



Father Amorth

*MY BATTLE
AGAINST SATAN*

FR. GABRIELE AMORTH
with Elisabetta Fezzi

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*Translated by
Charlotte J. Fasi*

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*To Saint Joseph and Saint Michael the Archangel,
patrons of the universal Church
— C.J.F.*

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Foreword

Much has been written about Father Gabriele Amorth, and as much could be written about his complex and deep personality and the prolific action that derived from it. In this book, two fundamental aspects of his persona immediately emerge: his courage and his faith in God.

Indeed, what stands out in Father Amorth were his strength and perseverance in proclaiming the truth about God. His fearless spirit, enclosed inside the armor of the combatant against the forces of the Evil One, always led him lucidly to unmask the thought and logic and the hypocrisies and appearances of the world. He decisively brought to light the abuses and distortions of the Faith, such as the lack of priestly formation in the seminaries regarding angels and demons, and the struggle against evil. In this area he was a farsighted precursor.

In the discussion in this book, Father Gabriele points out the necessity of re-Christianizing Christians, verified by the ignorance of the Faith that brings so many under the demon's deceitful control.

The ministry of exorcism led the man, the Christian, and the priest to faith in God's mercy and power, and in the maternal action of Mary, the most holy Mother.

Indeed, the second aspect that emerges from Father Amorth's words is his unshakable devotion to Our Lady. This devotion guided his obedience to the Church and his love for his suffering brothers and sisters.

The long conversation in this book is a catechetical and spiritual help. Father Gabriele's manner of speaking, often with joyful and ironic phrases — because he was joyful at heart — is exemplary when he deals with topics of faith and spiritual guidance.

As an exorcist, I thank you, dear brother. You have helped us to understand that to remain with Jesus makes us conquer our fears: the fear of disorder, the fear of death, and the fear of the Evil One's presence in our life. You have shown us that the exorcist is not a wizard, or a crazy person, but a man, a Christian, a priest, and a servant of God and His Church.

Read the Gospel! Apply the Gospel; act with total humility, knowing that everything depends on God. I do not consider myself capable of anything! Rather, I am humble, humble, humble . . . and I boast of it! (Father Gabriele Amorth).

— Father Paolo Carlin, OFM Cap.
Exorcist
Spokesman, and Press Secretary
National Delegate for Italy
International Association of Exorcists

Introduction

by Elisabetta Fezzi

In the early 2000s, through a series of interviews, I became acquainted with Father Gabriele.

He was already famous, a true myth, considered a legendary and miraculous chaser of demons by endless hosts of the world's afflicted who, not finding consolation in their local church, longed for an appointment with him. To others, he was the extremist priest who saw the Devil everywhere. At the same time, there were the endless hosts of consecrated priests and religious who were not able or did not wish to believe in the gospel or to become familiar with the immeasurable suffering of the many persons who are the object of the extraordinary attentions of the Enemy.

He had written dozens of books, preached on Radio Maria, and was on familiar terms with bishops, cardinals, and politicians. He was, however, extremely easy to contact. After I left him a voicemail, he returned the call the same day, and we made an appointment to meet within a few days. This was, for me, a source of amazement, because his agenda was jammed and he had the reputation of being unreachable; but the mission of communicating his ministry was so strong that he agreed immediately to our interviews.

Thus, one Sunday afternoon in Rome, on Via Alessandro Severo, I met him in the room where he practiced exorcism, a very simple space that clashed with the elegance of the building's entrance: a room with faded tapestries and a decidedly worn armchair, a statue of Mary, some sacred images, and a small crucifix on a low table. Before me was a man in a cassock, in a time when the Paulines had already put cassocks in the attic among the cobwebs. He was tall, bald, had crooked teeth and a welcoming smile, attentive smiling eyes, and a simple manner of speaking that took me by surprise with his truly unexpected capacity to communicate. He liked to say, "The habit doesn't make the monk, but the habit immediately says to everyone that you are a monk."

We worked well together that first afternoon. I had prepared for that meeting by reading some of his writings, but hearing him speak

passionately of certain mysterious things and of his love for Jesus and Mary was a unique and fascinating experience. This meeting was followed by several others; and a trust developed gradually between us, a mutual understanding, a feeling of friendship but with the delicate and decisive awareness of his being a priest.

Even today it does not cease to amaze me how a man so intransigent and with such an authoritarian character, a priest whose mission had him doing combat with evil spirits, could also be so sensible and sweet.

I recall an afternoon one Easter when I was in Rome with my family. We went to visit him, and he knew that there would be two small children with us. He was incredible: when he opened the door, he held two large chocolate Easter eggs. With the shiny green paper with which they had been wrapped, he formed two large rabbit ears to frame his face. And with a little dance and an expression of godly tenderness, he welcomed my two little ones. Then, he immediately organized a funny-face competition, just to play with them a little.

Slowly, throughout the years, profiting from my occasional work in Rome, I gathered more material, because Father Gabriele, although humble, loved to speak of himself and relate stories about his faith and his experiences.

One day I asked: "Father Gabriele, why don't we write a spiritual testament? Your spirituality is so rich! I think that it is important to pass it on to those who have not had the experience of knowing you personally." Becoming serious, he replied: "I have to think about it; it seems to me that I do not have much to say; what I have had to say I have repeated so many times." Then he added: "One may regret having spoken, but never for having kept silent."

A few weeks passed. Then he wrote to me confirming that he did not feel ready or able to write a spiritual testament; it seemed to him to be too great a project for him at that time. But such was his love for his experiences that he made himself available to go into depth over certain aspects of his ministry.

The text that follows is the fruit of those conversations faithfully transcribed: rereading them, I can still hear his voice with his Emilian cadence, his jokes, and his laugh. Those who have met him will recognize him without a shadow of a doubt.

In addition to his stories, in the second part of the book you will find testimonies of others who knew him: his faithful assistant Rosa; his doctor, Fausto; his only heir and spiritual friend, Father Stanislaw; and his confreres, Father Marcello and Father Stefano. Finally, there is the story of the young, severely afflicted Allessia, whom he knew along with her family. The book concludes with the eulogy from his funeral Mass.

I thank the Lord for the gift of this encounter with Father Gabriele Amorth: it has been extraordinarily enriching, and I have so much gratitude in my heart. I picture myself with him on the day we shall meet again, with his laughing eyes and his funny facial expressions, as he was so many times during our conversations.

Part 1

The Last Conversations

Before Father Gabriele and I began any work together, we prayed.

In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee. Amen.

Praised be Jesus Christ! May He ever be praised. Amen.

In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Father, most people think of you only as an exorcist, or as a popularizer of exorcisms, and as someone who scolds bishops who do not appoint exorcists. Tell us about your life before you became an exorcist.

On May 1, 1925, I was born in Modena to a very religious family. My parents were two saints. My four brothers (there were five of us; I was the youngest) were truly golden. We were extremely close. In school I studied the classics, and at the age of thirteen, I had already begun thinking of the future, of the priesthood and the religious life.

At the age of seventeen, in my second year of high school, I met Father Giacomo Alberione, the founder of the Pauline religious order, who gave me a final push.

I had asked him: "Well, what does the Lord want of me?" I wanted God to tell me what to do. Instead, I understood that I had to decide.

But God did intervene.

One day Father Alberione said to me: "I shall celebrate Mass for you tomorrow." And after the Mass he told me: "You will enter the order of Saint Paul."

"Okay," I responded. "But first I shall finish my last year of high school."

Then the Second World War started.

I didn't feel like abandoning my brothers and my family during that period, so I said: "I shall enroll in college first."

"Okay," Father Alberione responded.

So I enrolled in the university and then fought in the war. I received a medal for military valor in the partisan war in the mountains and on the plains of Modena.

After the war, I registered in the Christian Democrat Party, because drafting a new constitution was important. My companions and I agreed that we must engage in the writing of it, so each one of us did his part and contributed what he wished.

I was part of a group that was headed by Giuseppe Dossetti, my professor of canon law at the University of Modena. He also taught at the Catholic University and shuttled between Milan, Modena, and Reggio Emilia. Also in this group were Amintore Fanfani, Giuseppe Lazzati, and Giorgio La Pira, persons of great valor.

After the promulgation of the constitution, each one went his own way. Fanfani remained in politics. Dossetti was detained by Cardinal Lercaro, who mistakenly proposed that he become a candidate for the city council of Bologna, after which he founded a very rigid religious order for men and women. Lazzati became the rector of Sacred Heart University at Milan, and I became the vice delegate of the National Delegation of Democrat Christian Youth, Giulio Andreotti's second-in-command.

When Andreotti entered the government, he resigned from the Democrat Christian Youth, and I sensed that they would nominate me to take his place, so I also resigned. I understood that if I chained myself to politics, I would never leave it, and I wanted to be faithful to my agreement with Father Alberione.

Thus, I resigned, and I received my baccalaureate and my law degree in four years; then I immediately entered the religious order of Saint Paul. I completed my novitiate at Alba (Piedmont). Then I

went to Rome to study theology, and on January 24, 1954, I was ordained a priest. It was the centenary of the Immaculate Conception, for which they delayed my first Mass so that it could be celebrated in the Marian year.

My first assignment was at Alba as the spiritual director of a group of young people. I taught Italian in our high school; I wrote articles for *Famiglia Cristiana* and other Pauline journals; and I preached retreats.

For me, 1958 was a rather fruitless year; Father Alberione said to me: "Give up all your assignments because there is need for you at Bologna at the newspaper *Avvenire d'Italia*." I intended to do it: I was a friend of the director, Raimondo Manzini, and although Father Alberione didn't know it, I knew that they planned to cede the newspaper to the Society of Saint Paul. Instead, this plan was tossed out and another was born. The priest Agostino Gemelli asked Father Alberione if he would release me to go to Milan to become the spiritual director of the students at Catholic University.

I accepted.

But after a short time, Father Alberione asked me to give up the assignment because he needed me for another task. Then that one also went up in smoke. Well, that year all the plans vanished.

In the end, I went to the editorial offices in Rome, and there I began the most beautiful adventure of my life: in that year, in which I was more or less unemployed in Rome, I spent some time with the editorial staff and had some free time. The idea came to me, suggested by a saintly confrere, Father Stefano Lamera, to consecrate Italy to the Immaculate Heart of Mary: it had never been consecrated, never!

Because of the proposal that I work with *Avvenire d'Italia*, I had come to have a close friendship with Cardinal Lercaro. I wrote to him, and he thanked me for the idea of the consecration, making it his own. What a success for the Lord! He presented it to the CEI (the Italian Episcopal Congress), which at the time had twenty-five members. When hands were raised to approve the consecration of Italy to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, there were more hands raised than the number present, because many had raised both hands. (Lercaro did not know it, but I had gone to various bishops to prepare

them for this enthusiastic surprise.) Cardinal Lercaro then named me secretary of the organizing committee and ordered me to do everything. So, in 1958 and 1959, I dedicated myself to the consecration of Italy to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Since all the bishops had immediately approved the plan, I found all the doors wide open. There was, however, little time to prepare it!

A Jesuit, a certain Father Mason, suggested that we have the beautiful statue of Our Lady of Fatima come, via helicopter, to all the provincial capitals. The helicopter was the only way it could arrive at all the capitals within the year of the consecration. We had all this thanks to the help of Giulio Andreotti, who always helped me. Well, we prepared the calendar, and immediately all the bishops approved it.

We began on April 25, 1959, at Naples, and we toured all the provincial capitals until the end of the summer. The consecration itself occurred at Catania during the National Eucharistic Congress, September 13. There were only a few months, and we had to go everywhere whether on a Sunday or a weekday. We stayed one or two days in a city and then departed.

Since I was the organizer, and I was already a spiritual son of Padre Pio, I arranged to have Our Lady go to him. On August 5, I wrote to the bishop of Benevento to cancel one of the two days there. He accepted my proposal, and thus I gained time to send the statue to Padre Pio at San Giovanni Rotondo. Then, naturally, I also had to land at the Regina Apostolorum, where Father Alberione and some of the Paulines were.

This was the most beautiful adventure of my life, when I, a good-for-nothing, was an instrument for good in the hands of God. And so Italy was consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary! A great project! A great happening!

At first, there was enormous success everywhere, but after that, the Madonna was put aside. I had insisted that the bishops prepare a publication celebrating the event, but they always said no, it would not happen; they would not hear of it. And when I tried to write the publication myself, I did it poorly. I had to leave everything to Our Lady, to what she would have done, to Our Lady's actions!

Sometime later, I tried to organize a celebration for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the consecration at Trieste, but it was a failure: I had an imposing rival, the president of the CEI, the archbishop of Torino, Cardinal Ballestrero. He opposed the idea because he said it was a form of devotionism, and he had a horror of devotionism; therefore he quashed all the proposals I presented to the CEI. So nothing was done for the twenty-fifth anniversary.

Then I wrote a book in celebration of the month of May. At that time, the month of May was still a period of intense Marian devotion in parishes, so I wrote the book to help pastors, and it sold like hotcakes. Several editions were published in a very brief period.

Later, Father Alberione called and asked me to organize three institutes for the Paulines: one for priests, the Institute of Jesus the Priest; one for men, the Institute of Saint Gabriel the Archangel; and one for women, the Institute of Our Lady of the Annunciation. He entrusted them to me, saying: "You think about it."

The latter groups for men and women were already formed, but I had to go in search of priests who would enroll in the institute for priests. And thus, we began.

Slowly the number of participants increased. It was a very demanding job, and I then entrusted it to Father Lamera, who had a great rapport with priests, and who was indeed a great grace for them. I also left the Institute of Saint Gabriel the Archangel because I couldn't take it anymore: by then, the Institute of Our Lady of the Annunciation had grown to three hundred, and I was continually running around preaching spiritual exercises and retreats.

Meanwhile, in 1971 Father Alberione died.

In 1977, the superior, Father Tonni, wished to nominate me for the provincial delegate, a provisional assignment. He did not wish to nominate me for the provincial superior for Italy, but for a delegate, because he had some ideas he wished to develop, and he had need of an executor.

So I left the institutes and became the provincial delegate. It was a very painful, sorrowful year because the necessary instructions never arrived and because I was not adapted or prepared for that office; so, from my point of view, it was a very negative year. The positive aspect is that it detached me from the Institute of Our Lady

of the Annunciation. If not, I would still be there! It removed me, and thus I was available for other responsibilities.

For a year, I was involved a bit with some collaborators. Then Father Zilli, the director of *Famiglia Cristiana*, died. The magazine needed help, so the superior general at the time, Father Renato Perino, called me and said: "I need to send Father Andreatta [who was the director of *Madre di Dio*] to Milan to *Famiglia Cristiana* and, if you accept, I entrust to you *Madre di Dio*."

I had already directed this magazine when I was at Alba; therefore, I was not a novice in the field, and I immediately said: "Well, for the Mother of God, one does this and that!" After becoming director, I also became active in many other Marian activities, such as coordinating the various organizations, and so we were able to do many things. One of the last and greatest was on March 25, 1984, when John Paul II brought from Portugal the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, the one that never moved, that was fixed in the piazza. He had it brought for the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so for this occasion I gathered in Saint Peter's Square all the Marian groups. People also crowded Via della Conciliazione and the areas behind Bernini's Colonnade.

We organizers were in the first row! I could have touched the pope's hand when, on his knees, he consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Instead, I extended my arm and touched the statue! And then the pope received us in the Chapel of the Pietà, because when he held public gatherings in Saint Peter's Square, he then entered the door of the basilica and went up to the Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows, which is the first chapel on the right. From here he took the elevator, and after changing his vestments he returned. And thus he received us.

So, in John Paul II you found empathy and an ally?

Oh, and three times I celebrated Mass at his right, giving him my arm to hold up the chalice. And then, after I celebrated Mass with him in his private chapel, he spoke with me one-on-one. It was beautiful. Those were stupendous days!

How did you happen to become an exorcist?

In 1986, my life changed. I had had a very lighthearted rapport with Cardinal Poletti, because by nature I am a joker. One afternoon in June of that year, I decided to pay him a visit, so I called on him at his home, intending to offer him some cheerful company. He came to the door himself, and during our conversation he mentioned Father Candido Amantini, the exorcist at the Scala Santa at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. "You know Father Candido?" he asked me. "Yes," I responded. And he said to me: "Since he is ill, he has much need of an assistant." And I said: "But, you know me, I am a joker, a good-for-nothing, good only for telling jokes and playing pranks. . . . No way!"

I was aware, however, that there was nothing I could do! So I commended myself to Our Lady, asking in prayer: "Protect me under your mantle, and I shall be secure!" Many times after, the Devil said to me: "We can do nothing to you; you are too protected!" And so I am; I am protected under the mantle of Our Lady! And thus, in 1986, I became an exorcist.

Then I realized that I could not be both an exorcist and the director of *Madre di Deo*, so I resigned. There was no problem finding a substitute, so I was able to dedicate myself exclusively to exorcisms. I was aware of the terrible scarcity of exorcists, so I wrote my first book, which sold extraordinarily well. It was released in 1991 and is still going. It is on its twenty-first printing and has been translated into twenty-eight languages. Then I wrote other books, and I gathered the exorcists together and founded the Association of Exorcists, the first of its kind.

Also in this work, I saw that Our Lady was doing everything, because I found doors open and found bishops, who before were contrary, naming exorcists. There were still many hard heads, but many things were being accomplished. According to Monsignor Balducci,¹ when I began, there were about twenty exorcists in Italy; now there are more than three hundred. There is no directory, so it is necessary to ask each diocese how many it has.

Besides books, I wrote articles and gave endless interviews, and as a result I became noted as an exorcist; but to be honest, I am a Mariologist . . . and not a scamp [the words in Italian are similar, *mariologo* and *mariuolo*], as someone once christened me!

I am focused on Mariology; I am attached to Our Lady, to her mantle. I have spoken for eighteen years on Radio Maria; even this is an unexpected success, a surprise also for the directors: they think that my program is the most listened to. It certainly receives the most letters.

I do not know if I shall be able to continue, I do not know; it shall be as the Lord wishes!

It has been three months since I have been ill [the author is speaking in 2010] and threw in the sponge, and now I am convalescing. I always say: "Lord, let your will be done; do with me as you wish."

There are so many who pray for me, because I have been involved with so many groups over the years — above all, those of the Renewal of the Spirit. I preached so much to their groups, including at Rimini at their national gatherings, and to other groups, such as Jesus the Risen One, the group entitled Mary, and many others. I preached a lot, and I am very tied to them because they are the only ones that pray for healing and liberation. They are there wherever exorcists are lacking — there are entire nations without exorcists — and their prayers are extremely efficacious.

My books have been popularized everywhere, and then the Catholic Charismatic Renewal began to stir. Is the credit mine?

No, Our Lady did everything!

When I published my first book, like all authors I had only one ambition: that a second printing follow the first, because if there is a second printing, it means that the book has sold; if not, it means that the book is there, and no one is buying it. We at Saint Paul, being publishers, know about books; we understand them, and we calculate that the life of a volume is more or less two years. Then no one speaks of it any longer. Even famous books, even enormously successful books, after one year do not sell even one copy. But my little book — no one knows how — abandoned to itself and never publicized, continues to sell . . . because the topic is current.

I thank the Lord; I only thank God.

Here you have the skeletal summary of my life. It is brief. It may seem to have been done with a feeling of arrogance and success, but I have never had successes. All the successes are the Lord's.

Tell me about your first trip to Rome.

I came to Rome as a boy — at the age of seven — after winning a catechism contest. At that time, going from Modena to Rome was a big journey. Everything was free; all expenses were paid; there were five thousand children. It was the tenth anniversary of the foundation of Catholic Action for youth, and Pius XI was pope — that is, Pope Ratti (Achille Ratti), the rock-climber pope! At Gran Sasso, in the Apennines, where I went for so many years — now, of course, I no longer go — there is a peak named for him. He did not conquer it himself. Usually a peak is named for the first person who conquers it. They did well, however, to name it for this pope, because it has the shape of a steeple!

I love the mountains; it is wonderful to go to the mountains. I went there for more than thirty years. The rocks, the rocks please me! When I was 20, I would go mountain climbing, but now I am 114. I am joking; I am a few years younger — 84! The years pass; none stay behind. When one is young, it seems that they never pass, but when one is old, they cannot be held back.

So, you were a rascal as a child!

Well, I was naughty enough! I recall that when I was little, I invented a response for anyone who complimented me, which charmed all the ladies: “I’m not handsome but I’m *simpatico* [likeable]!” And then I played my pranks! My brothers and I were all very close; I was the youngest; therefore, I was the puppy, spoiled by the others but also thrashed by them. The youngest is always spoiled and roughed up, but we always loved each other. Two are in paradise, and two are with me here on the earth, in a condition, well . . . by now . . .

The oldest, Leopoldo, is 93 years old and in the hospital; the other is at home but immobile and confined to bed. They help him get up to eat; by himself he cannot do it. Until recently, he was a jolly fellow; then he fell . . . and that was it! And he asks himself, “Why didn’t I hit my head? I would have gone up there, but instead I am here, a bother to everyone.” He has a daughter who cares for him, so he is not isolated or alone. Such is life!

When a person is old, it doesn’t take much to give up, to convince oneself that one cannot recover. Then one gives up and becomes

depressed.

Were you a good student?

When I went to school, I did not want more than a grade of 60, nothing more. A 60 was enough for me, a beautiful 60. I never did, however, repeat a year! In high school my average was 70. Why should I break my back to get a higher grade?

No, I did not have a desire to study; I did so many other things. For eight years, I was involved in fencing. I was a swordsman, a fencer. I used to say that I was a professional, but it was nonsense. Then I did a lot of gymnastics in the parish.

My character formation came from my family and from Catholic Action. I always had some responsibilities: I worked hard; I taught catechism; and I participated in many sports. We had a beautiful courtyard where we played volleyball. We enjoyed ourselves so much.

It's important to have interests and to be active in sports. Mind you, I always had some good companions — in particular, my fencing companions at the high school; we fencing companions always remained great friends. High school was also a serious experience, in which we toed the line. Many of us were in Catholic Action, which was flourishing at that time! At Modena, meeting up with some old friends my age from Catholic Action, I said: "We didn't notice it back then, but think of what great spiritual directors we had when we were kids!" Our spiritual directors were really on the ball! I remember that when Catholic Action began to ebb, there was a national assistant, Monsignor Costa of Savona, on whom I played many jokes, but we were friends. I would say to him: "Now the cultural crisis is with the youth, not the clergy." We were blessed to have assistants who provided us with a fundamental structure, who were good role models.

Where in Italy are you from?

All my family have always lived at Modena except one: the orthopedic surgeon who lived at Cremona. He died at the age of 48! Toward the end of a surgery — he was the surgeon — he realized that his fingers were no longer responding. He told his assistant to finish. Then he sat down on a chair and said to the nurse: "Call the

chaplain; I'm dying!" They thought it was a joke. They said to him: "How stupid! It is only this damned operation. You are tired."

But it wasn't.

Poof, he was dead.

When you got older, were you still a prankster?

I recall a joke! We were university students, and there was a course at Assisi on spiritual retreats. A friend who was rather fat arrived in advance dressed as a priest and went to the nun's quarters, where we were supposed to stay. He presented himself as the preacher and was received very cordially by the nuns, who served him coffee. Then he excused himself, saying he was taking a short walk to town. Soon, the real preacher arrived, Father Franco Costa from Savona (mentioned previously), who, naturally, was dressed as a priest, but he had a very young face. The nuns immediately reproached him: "Look, we know that you are a student; they informed us. Go there, take off that cassock." The first was very convincing and [adding to his great performance] he had told the nuns that among the students was one who had a mania for dressing like a priest. In the end everyone was laughing.

It was great: this same friend was an engineer and Cardinal Lercaro's secretary in the year of the consecration of Italy, so I had my "fifth column" with the cardinal. My friend was very useful to me: each time I needed something, I would call him, and he immediately passed me to the cardinal.

Thus, through him, I learned what it means to be secretary to a big shot! I recall the time I wished to publish an article in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, and they refused me. Then I asked to speak to the director. When they asked who I was, I said I was Cardinal Lercaro's secretary, and they immediately passed me to the director and told me that my article would be published as soon as possible! I never said my name, but saying I was the secretary of someone important opened all the doors for me!

Once I wished to do an experiment. I was at Bologna near the Cathedral of Saint Peter. I had finished speaking with Lercaro and had to return to Modena. I was aware that on foot I was not near enough to get to the train on time. So I telephoned the newspaper

Avvenire d'Italia and said: "I need a car to take me to the station. I am here for Cardinal Lercaro!" They asked me who was speaking, and I said: "I am Monsignor Cialtrone" (in Italian, *cialtrone* means "slob"). When he heard "Monsignor," he said: "Oh, Monsignor, oh, Monsignor, immediately, Monsignor!" I did it as a joke, but the car arrived immediately. Obviously, they care solely for the title, not the name. They pay attention to appearances, not to substance! The driver was very accommodating: "Make yourself comfortable, Monsignor, please, Monsignor!" The surname [in this case, "Slob,"] went unnoticed; only the title remained.

With all your assignments and important acquaintances, why did you fail to become a monsignor?

I never considered becoming a monsignor; I always said: "Lord, I am awaiting another type of prize!"

But then the Paulines are not careerists. Father Alberione did not care for it. Once I asked him: "Could I apply to the CEI to become secretary of the Commission for Social Communications? It is our apostolate, and if I ask for it, they will nominate me immediately."

He responded: "I don't like the idea!"

He wished to have all of us with our tails down. In fact, none of us is a monsignor, and no one is a bishop. It is the founder's choice; he did not want to see a red hat in the house!

Also, he had always been humble, a humble priest, even though he had also been a close friend of Pope Paul VI. The day Father Alberione died, Paul VI came to our house in time to bless him before he expired. The pope always kept himself informed of Father's health, and when the pope was still just the cardinal of Milan, if Father Alberione was in town, they always scheduled time for one another. But Father Alberione always remained very humble — too humble to have ever accepted an office or a title.

There are other saints like him. For example, Saint Dominic was nominated a bishop three times, and he always refused. Then there is Saint Philip Neri, that joker. During his time, it was the custom to nominate someone by sending him a red skull cap. They sent it to Saint Philip Neri, and he ran through the square, tossing the cap in

the air as if it were a ball and shouting: "Paradise, Paradise, only Paradise matters to me," and he sent it back!

Speak about the history of your vocation.

I had always been in contact with Father Alberione, through letters and visits. Once he came to Modena, we no longer communicated from a distance. After my decision to enter the Society of Saint Paul, I was at peace, but before that moment, I was extremely uncertain about which religious order I would enter.

I met Padre Pio in 1942 when I was on vacation with my pastor; I was insecure, and I wanted a charismatic to give me some guidance. I am so grateful to my old pastor, Father Andrea Barbolini, who accompanied me and helped me so much!

During this first visit, I asked Padre Pio what the Lord wished of me and where I must enter religious life.

I was hoping that he would say: *The Lord wishes that you do . . .*

In response, he gave me a very uninspiring opinion: "Become a Franciscan! If one has good health, one becomes a Capuchin; if one's health is so-so, one becomes a Franciscan friar; if one is frail (and I think that you are frail), one becomes a Franciscan Conventual (where the friars live a less strict rule)."

Well, there was nothing charismatic in this response! Nevertheless, I always remained faithful to him. I went to Padre Pio every year for twenty-six years!

Anyhow, from my second year in high school I never wavered; I was always faithful to Father Alberione, and he always prodded me, advising me to finish my studies in jurisprudence.

Had you already heard much about Father Alberione?

Not at all! I did not know anything about the Paulines! I came upon him by chance.

I was thinking of the Passionists because I was impressed by the life of Saint Gabriele of Our Lady of Sorrows, and while we were at Torino we met a Passionist. Then my pastor had to go to Rome, and I accompanied him. We thought of lodging with that congregation, so we requested a letter of recommendation from an acquaintance at Torino. Then we sent it to the Passionists in Rome, and when we arrived, we went to Celio,² where I would return many times for

spiritual retreats and where we had the first meeting of the Association of Exorcists.

We arrived at the Passionists around seven in the evening, and the doorman received us coldly: the letter of recommendation from Torino had not arrived, and we were turned away!

My pastor, who knew Father Alberione, telephoned him from a pay phone and asked if he could host us. Father Alberione told him: "Look, we don't have any rooms free. We have, however, an infirmary, where there are two beds; there is no one sick at this time, so if you wish, you can come here!"

While there, during meals, we became acquainted with a very kind person from Bologna who spoke of Father Alberione and of his sanctity.

So I decided to ask Father Alberione the same thing I had asked Padre Pio: "What does the Lord want from me?"

I entered the Society of Saint Paul without knowing anything about it, without knowing what it was called, or what they did. I entered solely to follow Father Alberione! It was solely the result of a personal encounter. I knew nothing of the order; I only knew that Father Alberione was a great saint! What a man of God! He prayed not less than five hours a day. Day and night for him were the same; he never slept. Now he is in Paradise — where we shall meet again! When the Lord wishes it! When He will say His yes!

Later Padre Pio was your spiritual director.

Ah, Padre Pio! I never desired to have anything particular from him, but I went many times to see him. I stayed two or three days to participate at his Mass and to have him hear my confession. I went for twenty-six years, from '42 to '68. In general, I recall his various Masses very well, but above all the first and the last. What pain I felt seeing him in a wheelchair, reading the Liturgy with difficulty; what a difference from the Masses he celebrated at the beginning.

Once, when I was at San Giovanni Rotondo and was walking by myself, I smelled the intense fragrance of his perfume; it was so intense I could not escape it. Padre Pio's fragrance was a sign of his presence and his protection.

But we did not correspond. We were in contact only when I went to San Giovanni Rotondo, when I went to confession. But with him, in confession, one could always say something more. If there was something to ask, the questions would surface.

What would Padre Pio have said of your appointment as an exorcist?

Padre Pio died in '68, and I was nominated in '86. Yet he was close to me when I needed him! At various times, during the exorcisms, the demon would say, through the person being exorcised: "Away with that priest. I do not want him!" Padre Pio was present in the same way that Father Candido was present so many other times, and the demon would shout: "Away with that priest, away with that priest!" "Who is he?" I would ask, "Father Candido?" "Yes, yes, it is." Well, then, if the two of them are with me when I do the exorcisms, I am well placed!

Did you also have strong ties with Father Candido?

I went sometimes to the Scala Santa, and I met Father Candido and spoke with him. I knew him, but not well, just a little. But then, after my appointment, we were together for six years; we were inseparable.

Cardinal Poletti gave me a great gift when he named me an exorcist with all the powers. I was dependent on Father Candido, however, and therefore, I had to obey him like an iron rod. The first thing that Father Candido told me was: "Begin immediately at your home!" Then I went to him and we did the exorcisms together; we would talk and discuss the various cases.

How did becoming an exorcist change you?

The exorcistate changed my life. Previously, I was immersed in journalism and in preaching spiritual exercises and retreats. They were completely different activities, and progressively I had to abandon them to dedicate myself exclusively to the exorcisms.

I was occupied not only with exorcisms but also with exorcists. In 1991, I founded the National Association of Exorcists, which, in '94, was transformed into the International Association of Exorcism. Indeed, I was aware that there were very few exorcists and that

many priests and bishops did not believe in the existence of the Devil. They did not believe in the existence of “evil spells,” or they believed in “ordinary temptation” but not in “extraordinary evils.” Bishops did not nominate exorcists, because they did not believe there was a need. So I dedicated myself to writing informative books, which had a success that was disproportionate to their value.

For example, my first book, *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, is a very simple, slim volume, yet it has been translated into twenty-eight languages — an exaggerated worldwide success. Even now it is my most popular book. In the first year, there were six reprints, during an epoch when specific methods for marketing books did not exist. Yet it sold like hotcakes and is still selling. Shortly after its publication, a shocking thing happened. A priest, about fifty years old, stopped me on the street; he looked at me and asked me if I was Father Amorth, the priest who wrote *An Exorcist Tells His Story*. “I read it all in one breath,” he told me. “Nothing in that book was ever taught to me in the seminary or anywhere else!”

And to think that I believed I was writing the ABCs, everything that the teachers of religion and all the catechists should have known! Well, his comments pleased me, but they gave me much reason for reflection.

I had great success with the books, with the articles, and with the interviews in the newspapers and on television. Therefore, one can say that I did exorcisms but that I also dedicated myself to promoting the need for exorcists.

This work has never caused me any harm; I have always been protected by the Lord in an extraordinary manner, for which I have received much praise, even from bishops, many of whom I have often mistreated.

I have never hesitated to write, and to repeat it in every language, that if a bishop has a serious case before him and he does not provide help, he commits a mortal sin. I do not know how I could say it any better.

When one has the power of a monopoly, like a bishop, it creates a serious obligation for that person. Some bishops have written that this comment is too strong, that it is not true. However, there have also been bishops who have agreed with me; these bishops were

not offended. Therefore, I have never regretted having written this statement; undoubtedly it has been very stimulating, especially for those bishops who did not take exorcism seriously. I must say, however, that I have always been treated with kid gloves; I have never been given any trouble, even though I have not refrained from using very strong words.

My life has certainly changed greatly since I became an exorcist. Spiritually, it has done me much good. It has improved my prayer life and increased my faith in God, because it is He who does everything. Moreover, He has increased my trust and love for Our Lady, even if I already was a “Marian” and even if I had already written six books and hundreds of articles on Our Lady. Therefore, I can truly say that, spiritually, becoming an exorcist has done me much good; I have learned so much that I did not know.

When I was nominated, not only had I never seen an exorcism; I had practically never heard it mentioned, only superficially! Normally, when a priest is appointed an exorcist, he does not know anything about it. He must begin with the ABCs.

I am originally from Modena; I lived my first twenty-two years there. I had always been engaged in Catholic Action and in parish works, and I had always had contact with the clergy, but I never heard anyone speak of exorcisms. I never knew of the existence of an exorcist — simply because there weren’t any, not even one. Since then I have studied the motivations for this lack.

In the Roman Catholic Church, during the last three centuries, there was a progressive abandonment of the exorcistate, and the first who was aware of it and tried to remedy it was a Spaniard, the Carmelite priest Francisco Palau, who was beatified in 1988 by John Paul II. Francisco Palau gathered many of the sick in a refuge house near Barcelona and exorcised them all. Those who were demonic were cured and left; those who were truly mentally ill, he cured medically. When the bishop learned of his activity, he forbade him to do exorcisms, and Francisco obeyed, but by then he had developed an eye for those who were mentally ill and those who were demonic. Francisco Palau was beatified; his bishop was not!

Still today there are so many nations in which there are no exorcists. I have had many invitations to go abroad to speak on

these topics, but I was not able to accept, because [I was not able to speak] the languages. The few exorcists actively working were all exceptional cases. I would say that the Lord — because, I repeat, all the work has been His — has availed Himself of me to renew the exorcistate in the world.

Why did the Roman Catholic Church largely abandon the practice of exorcism?

Undoubtedly rationalism heavily influenced the Enlightenment. We must begin from when the Inquisition began, the mania of the so-called *bone femmine*, who were considered a little crazy and who then were called witches and sent to the stake. Note that in the Spain of the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada, no witches were sent to the stake. And in France, there is the famous example of a bishop who exorcised a nun who really was a witch, truly possessed by the demon, and doing immense evil. The bishop could have denounced her, but instead he performed exorcisms, and after two years of exorcisms, she was liberated and lived in sanctity. But intelligent bishops who act in this way are few. One day, during one of my interviews on Radio Maria, I was asked if Saint Charles Borromeo had sent any witches to the stake. After looking into it, I had to respond in the affirmative. Evidently sanctity does not exempt a person from being a victim of the mentality of his own epoch!

Then, with the world horrified by these excesses and this collective folly, everything was denied: there were no witches and no demons. Everything was swept away! Everything was abolished. As a result, there were no more exorcisms. One excess replaced the other.

Anyhow, the abandonment of exorcisms did not coincide with a negation of evil, but solely with a rejection of the idea that the demon has the extraordinary power of possessing persons and of doing them harm through some more or less serious disturbances. In practice, the abandonment of exorcism was a denial of the Devil's action.

And the Devil was happy about this! What most pleases the Devil is that his existence is disbelieved; about this, he is truly happy! Indeed, he does everything possible to keep himself hidden to make

it appear as self-evident that evil powers do not exist. This has been, and is now, his greatest triumph.

Anyhow, as I have already said, today something new is happening across the world, although even now no one teaches newly appointed exorcist priests how they need to operate in practice. This latter is the fruit of an attitude tied to the past.

To this day, I still have not managed to speak at the universities, even though I have many friends among the rectors. The first one I approached was the Lateran University in Rome, where I asked for permission to offer an extracurricular course on the sacramental of exorcism, which is one of the sacramentals listed in canon law. Well, it was refused!

Initially I also had refusals from the official Church. Then, when the latest popes began to speak of exorcisms and to encourage exorcists, things changed, and no one dares to oppose it officially any longer.

Would you want there to be university courses for the formation of exorcists?

In past centuries, when there was an abundance of exorcists, each one was assisted by younger priests, so that when one ceased to practice, there were others ready to carry on. This was truly a practical methodology!

My great advantage was having been nominated by Cardinal Poletti as an assistant to Father Candido Amantini, a saint and a famous exorcist, whom I had as a teacher for many years. It was my great fortune, because I started at zero. I knew absolutely nothing. Just yesterday, I responded to a letter from a priest, nominated last month, asking for advice. I told him to go to an exorcist and get some instruction and practice by observing his *modus operandi*. I have had several priests come to me, at times for a few months, to assist at my exorcisms, and then they are appointed in their dioceses, saying that they had been my students. That is the real school.

Unfortunately, courses at the university level do not exist. Something is done, for example, at the Regina Apostolorum in Rome, but it is a waste of time. Naturally, no one who is suffering from an evil spell would present himself at an assembly of aspiring

priest exorcists to be exorcised! The afflicted one seeks privacy! And to offer instruction without practicing exorcisms and without seeing exorcisms is ineffectual. One can profit from a certain amount of stimulus and some encouragement, but it is not enough. The true school is practical experience, and with more than one exorcist, because each one has his own technique.

One used to be able to film exorcisms, but the new ritual, among its many flaws, forbids filming and photographing exorcisms.³

For us laymen it's difficult to understand how the rules of the ritual function and how an exorcist chooses between the old or the modern ritual. Father Gabriele, you have remained faithful to the exorcistical formulas of the old ritual. Have you perhaps disobeyed the instructions of the Church?

For ten years, the new ritual operated contemporaneously with the old ritual; and I spoke and wrote critically of it, and, together with eighteen other exorcist priests, I sent the Vatican a letter called "The 18," containing criticisms and corrections of the new ritual. I have also handed it personally to the Holy Father and to the Congregation for Divine Worship. Our notes were not taken into account. Since the new ritual was already on the table, ready for the pope's signature, the only thing we succeeded in obtaining, with great difficulty, was the insertion of a *positio* that said that it was still permissible to use the old ritual, if one asked for permission from one's bishop, who in turn must ask for authorization from the Congregation for Divine Worship. Then, it would be legitimate to use the old ritual. I obtained permission, and, as a result, I am in compliance.

I have been merciless against the new ritual, and I did not spare criticisms regarding its fundamental incongruence: the prohibition of doing exorcisms in the case of evil spells! But why, if 90 percent of possessions are the result of evil spells? I obtained the removal of this prohibition in the new edition, and it was no small matter because the ritual had already been published with the signature of the pope!

To some, this discussion on evil and the Church may not seem clear. Does the Church truly not recognize the extraordinary action of the Devil with respect to evil?

To be precise: officially the Church has always recognized the action of evil. There has always been canon law, which speaks of the sacramental of exorcism. There has always been the *Roman Ritual*, which explains how exorcisms are done. Therefore, the official Church has always recognized exorcisms. But if bishops were not appointing exorcists, it was as if exorcisms were not recognized.

Anyhow, the historical facts must be framed in their own time; if they are not, one understands nothing. When the pope authorized torture for heretics, it was the result of a *vox populi* (a popular mentality) that desired it. In the case of exorcisms, a contrary mentality developed, and, in general, rationalists even today are contrary to the belief in these things!

When you were appointed an exorcist, you had already been a priest for at least thirty years, with a broad knowledge of God and a profound rapport with Him. Did this change through your exorcistic experience?

In 1947, I entered religious life as a Pauline; in 1954, I became a priest and, in 1986, an exorcist. I was already thirty-two years old when I became a priest. There was really no change in my life, solely a deepening of God's mercy, of His goodness, His magnanimity, and, naturally, His power! Saint John says that Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan (see 1 John 3:8), and I have seen Him at work! I have also felt with my hand the protection of God and of Our Lady. Here there is much to reflect on. Because of this experience, I have always been convinced that God is reached more with the heart than with the mind. Undoubtedly, I acquired a new advantage spiritually when I was appointed an exorcist. Since then, my heart has grown closer to God.

We can imagine that finding yourself daily before so much suffering, which is degrading in every way, you have also developed other qualities besides piety.

I developed charity toward my neighbor. Seeing so much suffering, from vexation to possession, causes one to participate in the suffering of others and to attempt to alleviate it, to do something to diminish it. Therefore, one grows in charity.

I must add that, for an exorcist, the work of bringing souls closer to God is fundamental. Very often, with exorcisms, we fail to obtain total liberation, but we can bring a person who has been distant from God back to living and practicing his Faith: going to Mass, receiving the Eucharist, going to confession, and developing an intensive prayer life.

All of an exorcism's positive spiritual effects on the afflicted are, in turn, also a stimulus to the spiritual life of the exorcist. I never received so many confessions, often united to conversions, until after I was appointed. An exorcist's strength lies, above all, in returning souls to God, bringing them closer to the Church, to the sacraments, and to the Most Holy One. It is our principal strength: at times, it can be the only one. This, however, does not diminish the value and importance of this work, because we wish for all souls to go to Paradise. This is what counts.

Liberation from temporal evils can have a relative value, seeing that the Lord has His plans for each person. I shall also say on the next transmission at Radio Maria, *Pleasing God*,⁴ that very often one does not understand why a liberation does not occur, seeing that, on the part of the exorcist priest, there has been all the commitment possible, accompanied by the presence and prayers of those assisting him and those of the family members who come in prayerful support of their loved one.

Well, God has His plans: at times, He allows a person to receive some torments by the Evil One as purification and sanctification. It is not for nothing that Saint John Chrysostom calls the Devil the "sanctifier of souls." Against his will, I would add!

God permits it because He looks ahead to eternal life. We are too tied to earthly life, to the things below, to what is immediate. Like children, we would like everything now, but God looks at the foundation of Jesus' preaching: "My kingdom is not of this world" (see John 18:36). Therefore, we must detach ourselves from the good things of the world — not because they do not have value; rather, so that they do not become obstacles to our looking toward Heaven. Saint Paul tells us: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on

things that are on earth” (Col. 3:1-2). It is all here — the reason why our exorcisms so often seem to have no effect: we do not see physical results because the effects are spiritual.

This is an important message, above all for young exorcists with little experience, because it is very easy to become discouraged by not seeing results. It is interesting that you say there is always a result, even if it is not visible.

There is always a result, always. People come to me from all over Italy and from abroad and tell me: “I have been to so many exorcists, but my case is too strong; it needs a strong exorcist.” They have this passion for a strong exorcist. But the exorcist acts in the name of the Church; he is a human creature. Okay, there will be someone with greater sanctity and experience, someone like my teacher Father Candido or someone like Father La Grua⁵ in Sicily. Even if sanctity has importance, however, it is not the only thing that counts. There are also God’s plans for each individual, and they are always oriented toward eternal life. If it were not for this view, we would be wasting time. But very often we waste time precisely because we get discouraged when we do not see results and stop fighting.

We can imagine that each exorcist is put to the test during his ministry. Obviously each one has his personal difficulties, but is there a trial that is common to all?

I think that all exorcists have a personal trial, which then becomes a demonstration of faith toward the Lord. All must act with immense humility, saying to themselves, “I am a good-for-nothing.” This is the basic truth! I am a good-for-nothing: the one who acts is the Lord, the Holy Spirit.

There was a great exorcist, Father Pellegrino Ernetti,⁶ who said, “The important thing at the beginning is to invoke the Lord, Our Lady, and the Holy Spirit. Then what counts are the prayers of command; all the rest is a waste of time!” Father Ernetti gave a thrashing to the Devil! But he also had consideration for himself. For example, he tried to avoid the spittle and the punches. He performed the exorcisms standing at the shoulder of the person he was exorcising. He always stood behind. In one of his books in which there are photographs (because at that time it was still permissible to

photograph exorcisms), we see that he is always at the person's shoulder.

What counts is great humility, great faith, and a readiness to accept the will of God however it is manifested, knowing that, above all, the exorcism has the function of bringing souls nearer to God and of increasing their faith and their charity. For example, if there is no forgiveness, there can never be any friendship or lasting bond. Forgiveness is also indispensable for marriages and for relationships between parents and children. If there is no forgiveness, nothing can last long. It is one of the foundations of charity! So one proceeds trusting in the Lord, knowing that one is a good-for-nothing.

In my experience, sometimes I have not seen any fruits at the end of an exorcism, and then later someone will say to me: "You know, Father, after the exorcism, I was much better; this disturbance ceased." I always respond, "Thank the Lord. I have nothing to do with it!"

There are dramatic liberations that come with much shouting or with the expulsion of various objects, but these cases are rare. I have had only one, but I shall tell you how it ended up. For a time, I was exorcising a married woman. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception, together with Father Giacobbe (another exorcist — more on the ball than I), we exorcised her for five and a half hours. She seemed truly liberated! There were tears, embraces, and leaps for joy . . . but some days afterward she was the same as before.

Father Candido said: "It is useless to do long exorcisms if it is not the moment established by the Lord." And indeed, at various times, it is the Devil, when he is being interrogated under exorcism, who will announce the date of his exit. The problem is that he is a rascal. In the case just mentioned, he mocked and ridiculed me: he told me that he would go away on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, something that did not happen. So I asked him: "Why didn't you go away?" He responded: "But haven't they taught you that I am a liar? Haven't they said to you that I do not tell the truth?" He took me for a fool. I felt truly mocked.

It is true that the Devil is a liar; at times, however, God forces him to tell the truth. I had an episode with a man about twenty-six or twenty-seven, from a rural area. He was a dreadful case. He would

levitate, so I had a friar, Brother Sebastian, plus three or four other very robust persons hold him down during the exorcisms. The demon always spoke in English, which I did not understand, but I had someone present who translated, and he immediately said: "I am Lucifer." You must realize that, for the demon, to speak his name is a serious defeat. But he revealed it immediately. He said: "I will go away on June 21 at 11:00 a.m."

We began the exorcisms in February; we had various encounters, and then, during an appointment after June 21, I found this young man perfectly liberated. I asked him: "At what time were you liberated?" He responded: "At precisely 11:00 a.m." Then I asked him: "How were you aware of it?" He responded: "I was working in the fields alone, and I believe I let out a loud cry, but I'm not sure of it."

For assurance, I exorcised him a few more times, because the liberations are often temporary: the demon goes away temporarily, hoping that the person will gradually distance himself from the Church and give himself over to a life of sin so that he can then snatch him again. In this case, the second possession will be worse than the previous time.

I fear temporary liberations. I also fear bogus liberations. At times, the demon pretends to go away, and I continue to exorcise for a while. In general, I do not say a prayer of thanksgiving for the liberation until at least a year after the event. Father Candido always said to me: "Do not expect to see the demon go away at the end of the exorcism and have all the participants content; don't expect it!" He goes away only when the Lord establishes it. The Lord has His plans; it is He who acts. In this case, the demon communicated the date, and he repeated it and he respected it, even though the person was not being exorcised at the time of the demon's exit.

Many people find entering into combat with the demon a terrifying thought.

Never! I have never been afraid. Not even at the beginning! Never!

I always say that it is the Devil who is afraid of me. I have said many times on television, "When the Devil sees me, he poops in his pants!" At the beginning, I was with Father Candido, so he had my

back; then I made an iron agreement with Our Lady! And so many times the Devil has said: “We cannot do anything to you, because you are too protected.” I have my guardian angel; I have Saint Gabriel, who is my patron; and I have the mantle of Our Lady! I feel like a lord; I always feel secure!

I have so much help from above. Those I have already cited are fundamental. Wrapped in Mary’s mantle, I have nothing to fear. I do not even have any vexations, although Father Candido did. Father Candido was a Passionist and worked at the Scala Santa. Once he was out of Rome, and one of his confreres arrived unexpectedly. The Passionists put the guest up in Father Candido’s room. The next day, after Father Candido returned, his confrere asked him: “How can you sleep in this room with the continuous noises?” Father Candido responded: “I don’t pay any attention to them!” But then he got up every night and went to the chapel to make an hour’s adoration.

Father Candido was a man of great prayer! I knew from someone who assisted him that he received assaults from the Devil on his deathbed: in his last moments, he stiffened and became serious and hard.

Well, we do not know how we will die. It is not for nothing that we repeat many times: “Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.” They are life’s two most important moments: the present and the moment of our death. They truly require Our Lady’s help!

It is difficult to imagine how a person can talk with a demon. How do you communicate, and what do you say?

Well, I received some great teaching. Yes, I did. Those whom I value the most love Our Lady. An exorcist friend who was older than I and who died some time ago once asked the Devil: “Tell me, what are the qualities of the Most Holy Mother Mary that make you so angry and cause you so much pain?” He answered: “She is the purest of everyone, and I am the filthiest; she is the humblest, and I am the most rebellious; she is the most obedient, and I never obey!”

Once during an exorcism, I asked: “One of your colleagues gave this response regarding Our Lady to one of my colleagues. Now, tell me: what is the fourth quality of Our Lady that makes you angry?” He

responded: "She always wins because she has never been touched by the slightest shadow of sin."

What words! Effectively, just a glance from Our Lady will send off the demon. There is also that episode at Lourdes, when, at a certain point, some voices cried out to Bernadette: "Run away, run away!" They were cries from the demon; it was enough that Our Lady glanced in that direction, and immediately they disappeared!

I recall a time when a demon gave Father Candido a lesson. He was liberating a person and saying to the demon: "Come on, go; the Lord has prepared a nice heated box for you where you shall not feel the cold, where you shall remain very warm." And the Devil imperiously responded: "You do not know anything; you do not understand anything," meaning that the Lord was commanding him to teach the exorcist a lesson: "It is not He that created Hell! We created Hell. He did not even think of it; the existence of Hell was not in His plans!" The Devil was saying that God created only good things.

No theological work states that God did not create Hell, but none say that He did. Precisely none! What an incredible lesson for one like Father Candido, who taught theology and Sacred Scripture!

As in every work, there are things that give joy and things that embitter.

What embitters me most are those people who are tied solely to the world and not to Heaven, who are attracted solely to material interests, who seek physical healing but take no steps toward spiritual healing. By contrast, what satisfies me most is when I see people unite themselves to God, convert, return to the sacraments, and then join a prayer group.

Anyway, I have always been a friend of liberty! I advise: "You do well by joining a prayer group, but without attaching yourself too much to it, because where there are human creatures, there are human defects. Therefore, if at a certain point you see that you are not comfortable in a certain group, go to another. Always feel free when doing good things." Many times, it happens that in a group someone wishes to take the upper hand, to overwhelm the others and take command, and then the group is no longer what it was at

first; there is no longer serenity, love, and peace, as before. This means it is time to change.

It is always useful to be supported by a prayer group. Living in a religious community, which is living in a group, goes back to Saint Pachomius. Saint Pachomius initially lived as a hermit, and then he became a cenobite, part of a group of religious who live in a monastery. At first, each one lived on his own, but then they joined together under the direction of a spiritual leader, and from that, a religious community was born.

Saint Pachomius had lived first as a hermit, and then he thought that it was better to change, because many other hermits were coming to him for advice, and so they decided to remain and live near him. Then he built a monastic house with a boundary wall, an enclosure. Once one of his confreres told him that the wall was too narrow, that he should make it wider, and Saint Pachomius snapped at him: “You don’t understand anything!” But then, upon reflecting, he realized that that was a brutal response to give one’s own brother. He understood that charity is exercised when one is in a group, in a family, at work, or any place where one is in contact with others, because in these situations, there is more opportunity to practice it.

Also, in groups there are so many opportunities to be charitable, and there is so much need [for charity]!

Returning to the discourse on evil, it is difficult to understand why some of the consecrated do not accept the possible extraordinary action of the Devil.

So many priests do not believe in the Devil! Even bishops! When they do not wish to nominate exorcists, or when they do not believe in extraordinary demonic action, we exorcists say to them: “You do not believe in the Gospel!” The Gospel speaks clearly!

Let us focus on the exorcisms Jesus performed in public. He did them on the street, in the synagogue, wherever He happened to be, and then He gave the power to the apostles, and they continued them. Now we must do them hidden and in private!

For me, Saint Mark expresses it best: “These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink

any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17–18). In virtue of this passage, during the early years of Christianity, everyone did exorcisms. Then, unfortunately, when the Latin Church tried to regulate everything, it instituted the sacramental of exorcism, reserving it to bishops. Since then, only they have the power to nominate exorcists among the priests, or they can exercise it themselves.

The Catholic Orthodox Church has never accepted this practice: with them, whoever wishes to exorcise does so.

I see it like this: with the institution of the sacramental, a monopoly was given to the bishops to follow Christ’s mandate: “Those who believe . . . will cast out demons.” Since all believers are not bishops, one could get around this obstacle with the prayers of liberation, which have the same objective but are not official prayers of the Church.

While exorcism is a public prayer, liberation is private, prayed with the simple authority of one’s own faith in the Word of Jesus Christ. I have always said, speaking of the nations where there are no exorcists, to pray the prayers of liberation — above all, if one is a priest; but the laity can also say them, and there are many places where prayer groups, especially those of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, say them. If they are done with true faith, they obtain results.

Once, at an international congress of exorcists, we listened to a conference on exorcisms and the Jews that was inspired by Jesus’ question: “By whom do your sons cast them out?” (Luke 11:19). From His question, one can infer that the Jews also had exorcists; it is spoken of only here, however, and the Old Testament does not cite exorcisms.

Therefore, I would say that true and proper exorcism was established by Jesus, who came to destroy the works of Satan. This means that Jesus also wishes to destroy the diabolical work that manifests itself by tormenting people: possessions, vexations, obsessions, and infestations. Jesus desires the destruction of these things. Jesus wants liberty, liberation; He judges a person’s needs, case by case, however, and He considers that spiritual necessities

are more important than temporal necessities. Therefore, I repeat that true and proper exorcism began with Jesus.

Now, someone could point out that the pagans also did them long before Him, through their gurus, wizards, and witches, who utilized pointless rituals, but in these cases, they are all the work of Satan. Also in this context, there were persons who were ill, who had some disturbances, who then sought these figures who worked through special rituals, often offering sacrifices, unfortunately, including human sacrifices, even babies.

I give this example to say that evil has always existed, and the search, the discovery of a way to combat it, is something that is inherent in human nature. The methods that were used to combat it depended on the sociocultural context in which the people were living. I believe that true and proper exorcism sprang up with Jesus Christ in order to destroy the work of Satan. Certainly, peoples' torment has always been the work of Satan.

Is clerical failure to believe in the need for exorcism the result of an extraordinary work of the Devil?

I would say that it is an ordinary action of the Devil, because he always tries to distance us from the Word of God, from the sacraments, and from everything that is good: it is his principal work. There is no doubt that it is an ordinary temptation; the extraordinary temptation is an exception, but the action the demon values most is that of making people fall into sin and error; and, in these cases, the priest also errs by not taking the Gospel into account, which is very clear on this matter.

The demon values ordinary temptation above all his other activities. His goal is to distance souls from God, making them fall into sin and making them end up in Hell. That is his principal goal. Then other things are added, but the ordinary temptations are the most important.

I believe, for example, that the demon is content that exorcisms must be kept hidden. If they were done publicly, people would see the effect they produce! For example, at certain Masses, where prayers of liberation are done, there are people who cry out and fall to the floor . . . and those who are present witness the effect that

those prayers produce! I think of the exorcisms that Jesus did in public and the great relevance they had in making people believe in the existence of the Devil. It is true that many priests do not believe, but there are many more laymen who do not believe in the Devil. There is no doubt about that!

I am grateful for the film *The Exorcist*, because fundamentally it is based on a real event that happened in 1946 and was romanticized in a book and in a film.

You have spoken often of the charismatic movement and its engagement in the spiritual struggle.

It is called the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. I believe that they now have 83 million Catholic followers. When I receive letters from countries where there are no exorcists, I tell them to turn to the Renewal, for its adherents pray the prayers of healing and liberation.

What about the flight of so many Catholics to other faiths?

People turn to other religions because they have no faith. Unfortunately, some also go both to an exorcist and a sorcerer! They go simultaneously to an exorcist and to a charlatan! I also continuously receive news such as: "There is someone here who says he speaks with Our Lady." Unfortunately, there are also persons who say: "I have received powers from Father Amorth," or, "I am in contact with Father Amorth," and it is never true.

I cite the case of a boy who came a few times to pray during my exorcisms, and who says that he knows me, and that he possesses certain powers, like the laying on of hands; and he performs other acts that he should not, imitating the words of the exorcism — all things that he is not permitted to do! I believe that he procured a copy of the ritual from us or that he bought it in a bookstore and misuses it. Obviously, he does not know his place!

But there are also those who attend prayer groups of the Renewal who impose hands; it seems to me inadvisable.

I combat these things; Father La Grua also combated them. It is a mania! Yes, a mania! It happens because some people think that they have certain powers. We have only the power to pray! Father

Candido said: "I am not contrary to prayer groups, but in the end we all have powers; we all have charisms. . . . We are all charismatics!"

There is, therefore, the risk that, after having assisted at prayers of liberation that were done well and brought good results, some will be convinced that they have the power to go their own way, haphazardly.

Also, it is necessary to know that to do the prayers of liberation well, one must keep one's hands firm. At most, raise a hand toward the person for whom you are praying, but nothing more. I have preached to many groups of the Renewal, and I have always spoken clearly regarding this. Then some go on to do whatever they wish, because they are also exalting themselves.

Exalting oneself is risky. You begin to believe you have powers you do not have. It is not for nothing that I started out saying that the exorcist must approach this practice with great humility, knowing that he is a good-for-nothing, and that it is the Lord, the Holy Spirit, who is acting, and it is Mary who intercedes. They do everything; we are only instruments acting in the name of the Church. If the Lord wishes us to serve Him, fine; but it is He who acts, not us, because we are not worth anything.

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council regarding Our Lady, there is an extremely strong word that is never mentioned: "consentient."

Mary at the foot of the Cross was consentient. I ask myself: "To whom was she consentient? To the executioners? To those who hammered the nails? To the flagellators? To Herod? No, she was consentient to the will of God!" She accepted the will of the Father toward the acceptance of the Son, and I add that she understood the value of His death for the salvation of mankind. In my view, she also understood its personal value. Therefore, the first words we must pronounce looking at the crucifix are "Thank You, Jesus!"

Prayers of liberation are very important, but it is necessary to have the proper instruction and motivation, because very often they lead to imitating what others do, and in that case, it is better to forget them.

A useful plan to follow for the prayers of liberation is to use good sense and to have the humility to avoid doing anything that does not

belong to us. Then it is necessary to say to oneself: "Is the blessing by means of the laying on of hands beyond my capacity? If so, then I shall not do it! Is it also beyond my capacity for members of my family? No, it is not. Therefore, I shall do it for them!"

It happened that a son who prayerfully placed his hands on his mother obtained a beneficial effect for her. In that case, there is a blood tie, and it is proper. Naturally, the person doing the laying on of hands must be practicing his Faith. In this case, it worked with a mother who was not practicing.

There must also be directions for imposing hands or for not imposing them.

My recommendation for *not* imposing hands is this: at times, there are persons who have some negativity, and in placing hands they transmit it.

Another reason, even stronger, is because it is a priestly gesture, and he can place his hands on the head of the one he is guiding in prayer, but only he and at most only on the head.

I admit that parents can place hands on their children to bless them, or spouses to bless one another, but in prayer groups, I do not agree to it, because there could be someone there who possesses a spell that transmits some negativity.

I have done two baptisms in the Holy Spirit. The first time, I was with a Dominican, Father Farisi, a great charismatic, and everything went well. But the second time, I was with various persons, all very spiritual, but they had their hands placed on a shoulder, which bothered me terribly.

Parents, as the priest of their own family, always have the duty to bless their family members, even by the laying on of hands. Even more so, parents have the right and the duty to make the sign of the cross on their children, blessing them. A parent's blessing is very efficacious. When I was small, I did not go to bed without my mother's blessing. Also, reciprocal blessings of spouses are highly advisable, because there is an extremely strong sacred bond between them, created through the sacrament of Marriage.

Jesus commands the apostles to preach the gospel, to cure the ill, and to expel demons. Is today's Church responding in

practice to Jesus's instructions?

No, no, the Church is not responding to Jesus' instructions. But I am also aware that the times are changing. For example, in the beginning, there was a need, a true need, for miracles; first Jesus needed them to make people understand who He was: "If you don't believe my words, believe my deeds!" (see John 10:37–38). When John the Baptist sent Him a messenger, Jesus responded: "Tell him the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up" (see Matt. 11:4–5). He sent back deeds to make people understand who He was.

And His first miracle, at Cana, ends with the words: "Jesus performed this first miracle so that his disciples would believe in him" (see John 2:11). Miracles served to stir up faith, because initially there was a need for them. Now the times have changed: we have had two thousand years of Christianity, and there is an endless number of saints, so there is no longer a compelling need for miracles.

Let's consider the Acts of the Apostles. There is Philip, who performs many miracles; Saint Paul also has his deeds. Today, in my view, this need is substituted by faith; today it is necessary to stir up faith, to believe through faith. Then no preacher will be able to say: "If you do not believe in my words, believe what I do" — no preacher, not even those who are saints and really do perform miracles!

In these changing times, we cannot fault the people of the Church for no longer obeying the norms that Jesus gave when sending out the apostles, precisely because the times in which we live are very different.

Anyhow, there have always been miracles, and there always will be! Each time a saint is nominated, there are miracles for the beatification and the canonization. Think of Lourdes, of Fatima . . . There will always be miracles in the Church, but not because they are within reach of all the priests or the preachers. No, not for that. Why? Because one must rely on faith! I have never seen a miracle, but I believe! And you have never seen miracles, but you believe. I think that the Lord will never cease to provide miracles. I, however, have never seen any.

Certainly I have seen the hand of God. I have seen it when I was exorcising; I have seen His power, but He did everything Himself,

serving Himself by means of a good-for-nothing like me! He did it all Himself!

We have some pontiffs who are a wonder; we must simply follow their directives, their pastoral line; that is what the Church needs today.

There is need of a new evangelization, of re-Christianizing Christians. Let us think of Italy, a Catholic nation. But where are the Catholics? They are a slight minority! If there were a referendum, they could check off that they have been baptized, but they do not pray; they do not go to Mass; they do not approach the sacraments; they marry and divorce with no compunction; and then, there is abortion.

Let us consider the Catholic character in Italy: the referendum on divorce approved, the referendum on abortion approved. If one held a referendum on euthanasia, that also would be approved.

These are the Italian Catholics! Materialism and consumerism! It began with the French Revolution: the successive philosophical currents were all masonic and anticlerical. Italy was formed and unified by Masons, all Masons: the Royal House of Savoy, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Giuseppe Mazzini — all were Masons. If one was not with them, one did not have a career!

At Modena, if one did not have party membership, one did not work. There was a collapse of values that is still in action; true values have been substituted by a supercharged materialism.

Undoubtedly, today something is lacking in the modern pastoral concept. If our priests were saints, our people would be saints! But one can also say that people get the clergy they deserve. Certainly, if every priest were like the Curé of Ars . . .

We thought that the Church would flourish after the [Second Vatican] Council. Instead the post-council era has been a disaster: 30 percent of the nuns, priests, and consecrated religious abandoned the Church! Who knows why? Then there are the sensational things, such as bishops who incriminate themselves with pedophilia!

In view of these facts, Satan has played his cards well.

It is true; he has played them well; for him, it has been easy! What does the Gospel say? “The gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt. 7:13–14).

Many ex–drug addicts have said that spreading drugs is a game, begun to prove something. Spreading vice is a game, a kid’s game. But spreading prayer, being on your knees, going to Mass, living the moral strict life of the gospel, is something else.

There is a tremendous question in the Gospel of Luke: “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8). This tells us that the Church’s journey is not from triumph to triumph but from struggle to struggle, from one defeat to another. It is true that there will also be victories, but it will always be a difficult journey. That statement is tremendous. Men always think of becoming grander, but it is not like that. I also see it in Catholic organizations: when they expand, they often become corrupt. Even elements of the Renewal have partaken of this corruption. The god of money tempts everyone.

All the saints formed religious orders based on the vow of poverty: this is where they began.

The most ancient bishop of Florence is perhaps Saint Antonino. One early morning, reentering the city while it was still dark, he walked along the wall of a monastery of brothers and saw a person who was collecting a pile of stuff and throwing it over the wall. Approaching the person, Antonino saw that it was the Devil. He looked at the pile of stuff and saw that it was gold. Antonino asked the Devil: “What are you doing?” “Well,” replied the Devil, “I’m throwing it inside; they’ll figure out the rest.”

You said that since many prelates don’t believe in the Devil and the disturbances he creates, they don’t believe in the Gospel.

No one knows how the bishops who do not believe in the action of the Devil can still be bishops, because if one does not totally believe in the Gospel, one is not even a Christian, understand? Not even a Christian!

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20). It is a serious lack; it is a serious, serious lack!

Many have the madness of taking from Sacred Scripture and the Gospel whatever makes them comfortable and ignoring what makes them uncomfortable. Yet all of it is the Word of God; all of it must be accepted. Especially the Gospel! Well, a priest, and much more a bishop, who publicly says, “They are all stories!” needs to read the Gospel, needs to read when Jesus gave the power to expel demons to the apostles, needs to read when the disciples — the seventy-two — returned content because “even the demons are subject to us in your name” (Luke 10:17). Jesus says to them, “I know. I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (see Luke 10:18). Here Jesus is already directing them to look toward Heaven, toward an eternal reality. But they were content because they had achieved success on earth!

I wish to relate a fact that truly happened to a great charismatic, the late Father Tardif (1928–1999). He was in the hospital, dying, and did not yet know the Renewal. One day, some of its members entered his hospital room and asked him: “Father, would you like us to pray over you?” And he responded: “Well, I am dying; I am not against it.”

They prayed over him, and he became well! Thus, he became enamored of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. At that time, when the Renewal hosted their gatherings in the spring, ordinarily forty thousand would show up, but when he was there, the crowd swelled to sixty thousand.

He had the gift of discernment. One day, before a crowd, he said: “Five of you in wheelchairs are feeling a tingling; the Lord is healing you. I ask these five to wave a handkerchief to be recognized.” Four handkerchiefs were waved. But Father obstinately asked for the fifth: “No, there are five. Where is the fifth?”

Nothing.

The fifth did not appear.

Then he invited the four, a little wobbly on their legs, to come onto the stage, to share why and for how long they had been unable to walk. After a time, he said: "There are seven deaf persons that at this moment are feeling a tingling, because the Lord is healing them. I ask them to wave a handkerchief. One of those in a wheelchair immediately waved a handkerchief. He had not gone up onto the stage because he could not hear, but from that day forward he had the use of his legs and his hearing! So Father Tardif said: "Lord, give me a grace. First, heal the deaf and then the lame!" And he always announced healings and recoveries.

Once he was invited by a bishop to a day of preaching, and the people were arriving at a snail's pace. On the previous day, the bishop had said to him: "Tomorrow, celebrate the Mass with a beautiful homily, but do not offer any healing prayers!" And he responded: "Your Excellency, the Lord has said to preach, to cast out demons, and to cure the sick. Regarding the Gospel, I give everything, or I give nothing. Good night." He got up and went away. The people were very upset not seeing him at Mass, but they would have been even more upset if he had remained and did not say the prayers of healing and liberation.

Which is to say: some bishops do not observe the Gospel. I also said on television (on *Porta a Porta* of the Rai International) that many bishops do not believe in the Gospel and do not observe it.

Also, if what is said by priests or by a spiritual father is contrary to the Gospel or to ecclesiastical depositions, it is best not to follow it.

Is finding too much joy in your success — and thereby losing your humility — a temptation for the exorcist?

This risk is codified in the Acts of the Apostles.

One day, someone asked me a very deep question. In the Gospel, John and another apostle told Jesus that they witnessed someone casting out demons in His name and that they prohibited him from doing it because he was "not one of us."

Jesus reprimanded them, saying, "You were wrong in prohibiting him" (see Mark 9:38–39).

Also, in the Acts of the Apostles, the seven sons of Sceva (who was a Jew) tried to do the same thing, saying, "In the name of that

Jesus invoked by Saint Paul, go away from here, Satan.” The Devil assailed them, stripped and bloodied them, and made them run off (see 19:13–16).

Why is there this apparent contradictory result?

In the first case, it is as if Jesus said, “Let them be,” while in the second, it is as if he said, “No, it must not be done.” In the first case there was real faith, the will to believe in the name of Jesus. But in the second case, there was only pride, only the arrogance of saying, “We also succeed in casting out demons.” You see, the seven sons of Sceva invoked the name of Jesus in the same way they invoked a wizard: there was no faith. And for that reason, their effort ended badly. Whoever sets himself against Satan without the power of faith, simply to contemplate his own successes, ends badly. It is a lesson to learn.

If I were pope for a day, I would give the faculty of exorcising to all priests, because the Gospel clearly says, “Go, heal, preach, cast out demons, and heal the sick.” Therefore, it is ridiculous that a priest can preach, hear confessions, and consecrate the host during Mass — all things that are much greater than doing exorcisms — yet they are forbidden to do exorcisms.

Therefore, I say, let everyone — men and women — say the prayers of liberation, and let all priests do exorcisms. In each case, if they are done with faith, the prayers of liberation and exorcisms have the same efficacy.

During the time of Saint Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), when exorcists failed to liberate someone, they sent him to Saint Catherine, who was neither a priest nor an exorcist. She prayed and liberated each one. Then there is Saint Benedict, the patron saint of exorcists, who was neither a priest nor an exorcist, but only a monk; yet he prayed and liberated souls. Padre Pio, Saint John Bosco, Saint Teresa, and so many other saints, without being exorcists, prayed over people, and these people were liberated.

We find the prayer of liberation in Mark 16:17: “Those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons.” It is enough to believe in God! Certainly one needs faith, the faith of saints! With faith, mountains are moved!

Certainly, Jesus was Jesus, but I admire those saints for whom one exorcism was enough to liberate a person, when I, at times, struggle for years before I get there. But in general, I am content if the liberation occurs in two or three years, because this means that things are already going well!

This is verified by a phrase from Saint Alphonsus Liguori, who understood much about exorcisms: "One does not always arrive at total liberation, but one always arrives at some benefit!" For example, I had a nurse who had gone to Father Candido; then she came to me. She came once a year, but we never achieved a complete liberation. Nonetheless, she can now work as a nurse, take care of her three children, manage her household, and pray. In all, she has a normal life.

In the Church, it is ever more common to run into offices and centers called the "youth ministry," the "scholastic ministry," and the "ministry of culture." Do you think there should also be a "ministry for healing and liberation"?

A ministry of liberation would be good, but it would require much faith; it would be necessary to believe in it. In my opinion, the times are ripe, and a group of persons could succeed in this. With the spreading of the prayers of liberation and a greater awareness of the topic of exorcism, more people are beginning to believe in these things. (I do not say the "general public": that would be expecting too much.)

Unfortunately, parishes are suffering today. There are few that function well. If many churches did not have organizations such as prayer groups, the Legion of Mary, the Knights of Columbus, and so forth, they would be empty.

In my opinion, however, it is necessary to begin with the ministry of healing and liberation. There are healthy parishes that already practice it, not just in the form of specific prayers, but also through charitable works: they note how many parishioners fail to make it financially to the end of the month or are abandoned and living in solitude or are suffering from spiritual problems. Some parishes do this and spend themselves in works of charity. In the Church everything is based on charity. Prayers of healing and liberation can

also be viewed as a great branch of charity: that is their reason for being.

It seems to me that a diocese could begin the initiative, and then go on to organize its parishes for the practical things: helping the poor, visiting the sick, and praying with people. It would have to become part of a larger plan for the parishes.

Since an exorcist priest can be appointed only by a bishop, it seems that nothing is left to priests, who must say, “I can’t do anything, because I’m not authorized!” The priest is reduced to an absurdity, not even able to do what is lawful, such as praying the prayers of liberation.

It is necessary to create a new mentality so that, working gradually, one can hope to change things. Then exorcisms would become widespread, and prayers of liberation common — for example, at the end of Mass. This is the way it is with the Orthodox. There, one goes to a monastery, rings the bell, and asks for an exorcism. The priest comes and does the exorcism, and the person leaves. It is the easiest thing in the world. For us, an exorcism is an affair of state!

After the publication of the new ritual, together with the 1985 letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, many wished that there would be a disciplinary document that would consolidate all the Church’s material related to the practice of exorcism.

Everything is based on the Gospel. Therefore, first, it would have to contain all the examples that come to us from the Gospel: Jesus liberating, Jesus curing, Jesus commanding the apostles, “Pray, cure, liberate.”

Second, it would have to speak of what the apostles do when Jesus is no longer with them. It is necessary to stay very close to Sacred Scripture, because everything begins there. Before Christ, there was very little! Yes, before Christ there were some Jews who did exorcisms, but it was extremely rare; this problem was raised with Jesus.

Canon law links exorcism to a license granted by the bishop. Is this norm still valid?

I think that everything should be revised. Why should the bishop have a monopoly? I repeat that I would give all priests, upon receiving the priestly consecration, the right to exorcise. Any priest would also have the power to do exorcisms and the prayers of liberation.

This would be my first reform.

Then I would insist on researching and reclaiming the ancient richness of the various formulas for exorcisms. Meanwhile, we have this unsubstantial modern ritual that I must still combat.

Just this week, a priest wrote to me asking if he can use the ancient ritual, and I responded yes, but he must go to the bishop, who must go to the Congregation for Divine Worship. Then the Congregation for Divine Worship will “gladly” — note the word “gladly” — send the authorization. All this process just to give a priest authorization to use the old ritual!

Third, I would create other prayers of liberation and of exorcism. Before the ritual of 1614 was issued, there was a great richness in prayers of exorcism. The old ritual was done well, and it was issued without being imposed. Whoever wished to use it could use it, or he could make up his own prayers.

Since it was done well, it gradually became self-imposed!

Regarding the exorcist himself, a priest exorcist must have the same characteristics that each man must have to become a priest: nothing more and nothing less.

Canon law states that an exorcist must have a “spirit of prayer” and an education. That’s all. And, of course, all priests must have these characteristics.

Therefore, I repeat, an exorcist must have nothing more than what a priest must have.

Some maintain that an exorcist has greater need for the charism of liberation than he does for the nomination of a bishop.

Well, when a person receives an appointment from a bishop, that person’s private prayer becomes a public prayer, which means that it now includes the authority of the Church, and, as a result, it becomes more efficacious. Certainly personal prayer and the prayer

of the one being exorcised counts. God gives the charism to the one who wishes it; there is no need for special qualities. One can be illiterate and still have the charism of healing and liberation.

If a layperson or a consecrated religious has a charism, what does he do with it? How does a person know he has a charism?

Well, in general, persons who have a true charism do not seek publicity. They work secretly, with humility; they are persons of great prayer and are completely disinterested. Those who announce that they have charisms do not have them. Persons with charisms conceal them.

Anyhow, the document *Lumen Gentium* declares that it is the bishop who decides whether a person has a charism. However, a bishop already has much work to do. If he were also busy with this task, he would no longer have time to be a bishop. Therefore, we must use good sense and follow the Gospel: "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). This is the fundamental rule.

Prayers of liberation, worked on persons and for persons, vary from priest to priest and from bishop to bishop: there is no one criterion; each bishop decides for himself.

During an exorcism, you touch the person lightly with your stole.

One could also not touch the person; I put the stole on the shoulder of the person being exorcised and my hand on his head.

It is common practice for the exorcist to encourage the use of sacramentals: blessed oil, salt, water, and relics. But in the Christian community, we see a steady decline in the use of sacramentals.

Sacramentals are efficacious, but only if used with great faith. If used without faith, they serve no purpose; they become empty gestures. The efficacy of sacramentals is based on faith and only on faith. By dint of applying them without faith, they have fallen in disuse.

For example, blessed water has great efficacy if it is used with faith; otherwise it is useless. There is also the risk that if they are used without faith, they will become magical surrogates.

Many persons also regard the exorcist as a wizard, as one who has extraordinary powers. I always respond that I am not worth a grain of sand; it is God who does everything.

Besides sacramentals, demons are also affected by religious songs. Gregorian chant is the strongest of all the common chants because it is the most ecclesiastical. Sometimes Father Candido would also speak phrases in Greek, which is the original language of the Gospels. It is a shame that it is no longer used in the process of liberation.

Many priests refuse to bless water and salt, perhaps because they think that the faithful do not know how to use it according to the Faith; I think that is the reason. Or perhaps because the same priests are lacking in faith!

Frequent confession is prescribed by nearly all exorcists, but in some parishes the faithful are encouraged to practice a generic evaluation of their own moral conduct.

It is wrong, it is wrong. The penitent must reveal his sins, one by one, not generalize. It is wrong.

At times, I note that among the persons exorcized, those who approach the sacrament correctly receive the most grace. I say "at times," because only God can judge; that is, only God can measure the faith of a person who approaches the sacraments.

The Eucharist is the center of the Christian life. This celebration can become more fruitful if the journey toward liberation includes an explanation of what it is, how it is approached, how indispensable it is, and how necessary proper decorum is.

You often see people chatting freely in church, as if nothing is going on. "My house is a house of prayer!" (see Luke 19:46). Therefore, it is necessary to learn respect toward all things sacred, especially toward the Eucharistic Jesus. There is much need for this catechesis.

Some maintain that the old Eucharistic rite, pre-Vatican II, was more efficacious for liberation. For example, in the old Mass, at the end of the celebration, there was an exorcism.

I categorically deny that the old rite was more efficacious. The substance of the Mass is always there; it cannot be escaped. Rather,

everything depends on faith, on commitment, on the fervor that one puts into it; it does not depend on the Latin rite or the Italian, or any other language; language has no influence on the rite.

Well, there is also an exorcism at the end of the Lord's Prayer: "but deliver us from evil"! "Liberate us from the Evil One" is the true translation! Liberate us from Satan. This is also an exorcism, or a prayer of liberation; we may call it as we wish.

Many Christians are turning to oriental practices to find serenity and interior peace.

All these practices are deceitful! They are human practices, founded by men who, very often, never intended to make a religion. For example, Buddha did not wish to create a religion. He considered his teachings a philosophy, and he taught them as a philosophy; later, Buddhism became a religion. They are human practices, taught by men who, deepening them, develop them into a denial of the existence of God and, even worse, end by deifying man himself, putting the self in the place of God. All these techniques are incompatible with the Christian vision and should be discarded.

Wizards, sorcerers, fortune-tellers, and Satanists were, at one time, the ones who opened the doors to Satan. Now many exorcists refer to spiritual problems that are a consequence of the common acceptance of oriental practices such as yoga.

Following these practices is a mistake. As I have already stated, they are all errors. And one builds nothing valid with errors.

The history of the Church teaches that the Holy Spirit has provided for all the needs of each epoch by raising up members who respond to the most urgent questions. Could we audaciously think about a new charism dedicated to interior healing and liberation?

Certainly a charism exists, but few possess it, so there is no need to add another. It is the Lord who guides charisms: He can give them, and He can also take them away. It has never been said that one is charismatic forever! There are some persons who had truly great gifts, and then, a little at a time, they became cheats and swindlers

because they wished to make money. As a result, they lost every charism.

In my view, it would not be enough for a priest to create a religious order dedicated solely to healing and liberating. I know of an attempt that was made in France at the Sacrificed Lamb, where they had a branch named for Saint Luke the Evangelist, the medical doctor. It was a place where persons who had a need for prayers of liberation were hosted. It all ended, however; it had no followers.

Throughout the centuries, various orders have sprung up for the sick, the lepers, and the poor. All types have arisen, but never an institution for exorcism. It is unclear why.

Exorcism has its hands and feet tied to the local bishop. If a priest creates an institution that is tied to a certain bishop, he has no guarantee that the bishop's successor will renew the authorization. Then everything will collapse. Perhaps this is the reason that, throughout all the history of the Church, there has never been an attempt to establish an institution for exorcism, notwithstanding the great need. For example, a house that hosts those who come from a distance, from other cities, to be exorcised would be helpful — a house where these persons would be respected. The demand exists, but also the difficulties.

Often the demopathic experience is a long journey toward liberation, and the afflicted have great need of personal and priestly prayer, exorcisms, the sacraments, and the classical spiritual exercises.

There are many things to keep in mind. It is important that the exorcist be a man of prayer and faith, and that the person being exorcised also be a person of prayer and faith. It is useful — I would even say necessary — that they be persons who are sustained by the prayer of others: by family members, acquaintances, friends, and religious institutions. More important, however, is God's plan for each person.

God can will that a person remain afflicted, so that he may offer his sufferings and his sacrifices for the salvation of souls, for ends that are very important, useful, and necessary. It is necessary to keep in mind God's plan for each person; this is a factor that must always be

considered! This is the reason certain persons, although having all the other requisites, do not progress and are not liberated. In these cases, one must ask what the divine plan is. It is also so with illnesses, with the same symptoms and the same cures: sometimes one person heals, and another does not.

Father Gabriele, you have met persons who offered their sufferings for the salvation of the Church and for souls. They were aware and conscious of this, but the cross is not easy to carry.

The afflicted always hope to be cured or to be liberated. One may be liberated only after years and years of affliction; during that time, however, they offer their sufferings for His goals, and they submit to His will. Father, let Your will be done!

It is always necessary to recall that the Devil is the “sanctifier of souls,” even though it is not his objective. It is necessary to learn to transform suffering to gratitude. In this way, one renders thanks to God.

Padre Pio was beaten daily by the Devil, and he submitted to all of it! One day, after the usual blows, he saw his guardian angel, and he asked him: “Why don’t you intervene?” And his angel, nearly with tears in his eyes, responded: “Because the Lord has prohibited me.” God was snatching souls from the Devil, and the Devil was reacting! Each one has his role.

Suffering disgusts us! But it has an immense value when it is offered in union with the suffering of Christ! For an atheist, suffering is absurd. I understand, because atheists support euthanasia. When a person is old and sick, he needs help, even when there isn’t any, so he welcomes an injection that puts an end to his suffering: so thinks a person who has no faith. But a person who has faith knows that suffering is necessary: everyone who goes to Paradise must pass through Calvary: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Jesus is clear! I have seen various persons rejoice in their sufferings.

The important thing is to do the will of God; it is enough to follow the commandments and the guidelines of the Church and to conform to them.

Catholic theology, on the topic of salvation, offers some adequate motivations for understanding the ministry of exorcisms and liberation, and all of it is based on Sacred Scripture. In the Gospel there is everything. Let us never forget it: in the Gospel there is everything!

Baptize, cure, and liberate: everything was shifted to the sacrament of baptism, while liberation and healing seems to have been put aside.

[This is so] for the reasons that I previously gave: because there is less need of miracles, healing, and liberation; there is less need of it than in the early times of the Church.

Perhaps the baptized person risks setbacks, thinking that he is protected and therefore less subject to the danger represented by Satan.

Baptism does not empower the Devil. The baptized person has an advantage, a great advantage: he has sanctifying grace, the sacraments, the sacramentals, and the spirit of prayer. He benefits because he is baptized and practicing.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore that very many baptized, once they receive the sacrament of confirmation, no longer go to Church; therefore, they are no longer practicing their Faith.

Anyhow, Christians, if they make use of the sacraments, have all the graces that derive from them by having received the sacrament of baptism. If one wastes these graces, does not use any of them — for example, the sacrament of penance — well, it is his business. If one holds all one's sins close, the fault is his. Baptism is a very strong antidote against the Devil, who has an easier time with the nonbaptized and with pagan populations.

Today many priests do not believe in the actions of the Devil, and even more of the faithful do not believe, because the shepherd influences his flock. Probably, if people underestimate the action of the Devil, the Devil is empowered.

Well, certainly it is dangerous not to believe, not to be informed. A suitable instruction is needed. Therefore, knowing the problem

imposes more responsibility but also more advantages, because the person who is aware can turn to the means of grace.

Pentecostal and Evangelical churches reveal a greater vitality in the area of healing and liberation; with these denominations, healing and liberation are part of the ordinary ministry.

It is true. The Eastern Orthodox Catholics are also like this. They have never tied the sacramental of exorcism to the pope; they have never accepted this practice. For the Orthodox, whoever wishes to exercise the ministry of exorcism exercises it, exactly as it was in the first centuries of Christianity, when all Christians were able to perform exorcisms.

In nations that practice the Greek Orthodox rite, it is easy to find someone who practices exorcism. There is no difficulty; it is like going to a monastery to seek a confessor. Whoever has a need or a desire for an exorcism goes to the monastery, rings a great bell, asks, and obtains. This is a good system! Certainly it is better than ours.

The only difference is that, with us, the exorcist has a mandate, and therefore, he acts with the authority of the Church, while the Orthodox and the Pentecostals treat exorcism as a private prayer, which is, per se, less efficacious. They do not have the authority of the Church, because they are private prayers, not public prayers. And being private, their validity depends on the faith in which they are prayed.

The ancient Benedictional contains a great quantity of blessings for all occasions, from harvests to moving into a new house . . .

Certainly! There were blessings for the bridal chamber and for so much more, even for ants; it is a shame they have disappeared! They served to remove every trace of vulgarity from a divine relationship, because everything depends on God. God is the master of everything.

Evil is more than ever part of the contemporary man's choice. Truly it seems that evil's transcendent action sometimes threatens to overwhelm all personal decisions.

Yes, yes, the Church is conscious of it and is adequately taking on this challenge: ecclesiastical documents and various encyclicals of the recent pontiffs consider these points of view. The areas most exposed to this point of view are those where there is less prayer, less preaching, and a more deeply rooted atheism: those are the most vulnerable situations.

Jesus' disciples know that they have already won. This is the key to their great certainty.

Let's be careful: we know that Christ has won! But we are still battling; we are still in the mix, in the struggle, and we do not know how it will end, because if we are with Christ, fine; but are we sure of persevering?

For example, I have done many prayers of liberation and many exorcisms with Monsignor Milingo. Then, in his old age, despite all his good works, we know what happened.⁷ How can we be certain that we shall always persevere? We need to know that we cannot be sure of it! Therefore, it always takes humility, fear and trembling, and many, many prayers.

What advice would you give to your exorcist colleagues about the best way to act?

Well, I tried to put everything that I felt was useful for the exorcists in my three books.⁸ I advise them to read my books because rather than giving superficial advice in them, I have looked at things in depth! In these books there is as much advice as one could wish!

I do not, however, use the same, exact technique in all cases. Each case must be studied in itself; each case is different.

What are the practices and techniques that have proven most effective over the years?

Faith, prayer, humility, humility, humility, humility, humility.

To be effective, one always needs more faith and more humility, to be more certain of being a good-for-nothing, more trusting in the Lord, and more willing to abandon oneself to the mercy of God. Liberation is a gift of God; it is not the result of the merits of the exorcist; *it is a free gift of the Lord!*

There have been priests who consider themselves your spiritual sons or continuers of your work.

There are so many who consider themselves my spiritual sons because they began assisting at a series of my exorcisms; then they became exorcists, and they found it very useful to have participated. But I dare not say, "This priest is my spiritual son." I dare not say it. Others may have learned something from what I was doing, but then they will gain something from their own experiences. The priest who has been closest to me is a Passionist, Father Stanislaw,⁹ who has helped me for many years, and who has a true vocation for liberation.

No priest has regarded himself as my spiritual son in the same way that I was sent to Father Candido until I was molded. This never happened to me. Frankly, I would not have even desired it. No, it does not seem to me that I have anything to teach. If, someone assists me at my exorcisms and thinks that there is something to learn, then I am pleased.

Have any souls in Hell ever been able to leave this abyss and go up to Heaven?

It is impossible! One day, one of the girls of Fatima asked Our Lady: "Could a condemned soul repent? Could God take him from Hell and put him in Paradise?" Our Lady responded: "Oh, yes, He could, but they do not wish it!"

When one persists in evil, nothing can be done. I once asked a demon, "But you, if you could go back, would you do the same thing? Don't you see that, before, you were happy in Paradise and now you are damned to Hell?" "You don't understand me," he answered. "I have the strength and courage to rebel against God! Therefore, I am superior to Him!"

When a being believes that disobeying and sinning against God makes him superior to God, nothing can be done.

It is impossible for a damned soul, a soul already in Hell, to be saved. It is impossible.

All the conceivable attempts to convert him have already been offered to him by God. Saint Peter tells us, "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward

you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). God wishes everyone’s conversion, and then one sees so many perverse people to whom everything is given, and everything goes well: they have health, financial success, and friends. Everything goes smoothly. In addition, God gives them opportunities to convert while they are on earth: afterward there are no more chances. What has been done has been done!

We have no idea whether a condemned soul becomes a demon in every way or remains “chained.” We have so many descriptions of Hell given by saints who have had the grace to see it. They give different descriptions but always speak of atrocious sufferings.

For example, regarding solitude, I once asked a demon: “If two people hated each other until death and found themselves together in Hell, would they continue to hate each other?”

He responded, “Don’t you understand that each soul in Hell thinks only of himself? He does not look at others. He is focused solely on his own suffering. He makes light of the suffering of all others.” This is precisely the opposite of charity!

Then Hell is for those persons who deliberately refuse each chance God gives them.

Hell is reserved for those who refuse the mercy of God up to the last instant, because God offers the possibility of conversion up to the last instant.

Let us consider Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and her mission. There was a criminal, an Italian who was condemned to death by the guillotine; and she said to the Lord: “I ask You this: make this man, Pranzini, demonstrate a sign of repentance, as I now, at the moment of his death, offer and dedicate my prayers, my sacrifices, and my renunciations for him. If You grant this favor, You will make me understand that this ‘way’ is pleasing to You.”

Pranzini remained hardened until the very end, even refusing the sacraments. Then, at the last moment, he turned toward the priest, tore the crucifix from his hands, kissed it with great fervor, and gave it back to him. Then, *thump*, his head was cut off. Saint Thérèse saw the sign that she had asked for: her sacrifices and sufferings, which no one saw, were useful.

The story of Saint Thérèse is interesting, because no one in her convent believed that she was a saint, least of all her blood sisters. Céline, her favorite sister, took all Thérèse's letters and burned them! An immense patrimony was lost! When they took Thérèse to the cemetery, there were five people! Five people in all! Years after, when they returned to the cemetery, there were more than twenty thousand people!

But let us return to what interests us, that even up to the last moment, God pursued this Pranzini. He followed him until the last moment of his life, and He saved him! But if one refuses His mercy and continues to refuse it . . . then so be it!

What do you think about Muslims?

Muslims who truly follow their religion are in good faith, and the Lord is aware of it. But one must keep in mind that one of their five fundamental principles is holy war, to make war on all infidels, and to kill all of them! Let us also look at how a woman is viewed by Islam! She is not worth a cigarette butt; she is an object, a simple object! Let us consider the private life of Muhammad: he fell in love with the wife of his son, took her for himself, and kept her. Then he claimed that the Lord informed him that he did well!

And where do the commandments of God end up? For us, it is difficult to understand, because it would be necessary to immerse ourselves in the mentality, the place, and the times; because one cannot judge a historical fact with the mentality of our own days.

Anyhow, there is no doubt that the mercy of God exists also for Muhammad and for the Muslims, and each one will respond according to his conscience and his deeds.

Can we affirm that we Christians are privileged, but that we must also do something more for others?

Without a doubt, we Christians have greater duties that will be compensated with interest in Paradise, where all will not be equal. Saint Paul says it will be "as in the firmament where the stars differ among themselves in splendor" (see 1 Cor. 15:41).

And Dante, the great poet and great theologian, regarding this fact, uses that famous verse relative to jealousy: "In His will is our peace!"¹⁰ The perfect peace is the will of God.

What did you think of exterior signs that are worn?

There are persons who come to me with a collection of ten to twelve medals around their neck. I do not agree with this. I wear two: the Miraculous Medal and one that one of my aunts placed around my neck when I was born (it has been reduced to a thin leaf). It is a picture of Our Lady of Pompeii, and on the back are the words "May she protect you." This medal has had so many ups and downs; it has been lost and found so many times by chance. And I always repeat: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you!" This prayer is particularly pleasing to Our Lady, because she herself invented it before the dogma of the Immaculate Conception existed.

One hears that some priests keep relics in their stoles.

No, I do not have any. I have many relics, but I do not keep any in the stole, because it is a sacred garment in itself. In general, priests do not keep relics in the stole.

Is it true that wizards still do much damage?

Yes, yes, there are many wizards; they have offices filled with clients. But wizards that are truly tied to Satan are rare. The majority, fortunately, are charlatans. Those tied to Satan are the most effective. They obtain the most; they truly do damage. If someone has an enemy he hates and wishes to harm, he goes to one of these wizards and procures many evils aimed at that poor person, things that could not be imagined.

For the victim to be released, he must submit to exorcisms, and here I am!

These wizards act in Satan's name, and they are his slaves.

If a person has been attacked by black magic, can an exorcist obtain a lasting effect?

The effect of an exorcism is always unpredictable. I wish to emphasize that, even though the Lord never wishes evil, He respects human liberty. Besides, God can use one person's bad action to carry out His good plans for another.

We see it with extreme clarity in the Passion and death of Christ: the Devil influenced Judas to betray Jesus. He influenced Caiaphas,

Anna, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers; but everything was carried out in such a way that each of these persons maintained his own complete responsibility.

Once I was asked: "Was Judas's betrayal necessary to obtain the Crucifixion and death of Jesus?" No, no, it was not at all necessary. In the Gospel, it is evident that they wished to kill Jesus, but not during the festival days of Passover because they were afraid of the crowd. But having been handed the betrayal of Judas, they changed their plans, and they arrested Him during the Passover feast. If Judas had not betrayed Him, they would have arrested Him after the feast!

Each person is responsible for his actions, but God arranges things in a manner that all collaborate with His plans.

I also wish to point out that, when viewed from a broader perspective, what at first seems negative can lose its negativity, because nothing happens without the supervision and limits that God imposes. For example, they can pay a killer to kill me and make him do it at a moment in which his conscience permits it. The Lord then receives me, and I go straight to Paradise: martyrs go directly to Paradise.

What are the differences between vexations and possessions?

To understand the difference between a severe vexation and a possession is easy: Padre Pio was never possessed, and neither was the Curé d'Ars. Possession occurs when the Devil takes possession of the body — never of the soul. There is a loss of consciousness, and there are other symptoms, such as speaking in unknown languages, knowledge of things that the possessed person would not otherwise know, superior strength, levitation, et cetera. Once I had a case of a person who would levitate even though she was held down by four robust men!

But if there are disturbances, even very strong disturbances, without possession of the body, then it is not possession. We think of the Curé d'Ars thrown from his bed so many times or Padre Pio savagely beaten, and his head banged on the floor. They were always present to themselves, always aware: therefore, it was not possession.

It is difficult to understand if what we are watching in films is possession or something else — for example, when eyes turn around, or a person growls or produces other animal sounds.

In general, with possessions, the possessed person does not remember anything, but with vexations he remembers everything that happens.

Cases of possession are very few, while infestations (disturbances in a place) are numerous.

At times, we find ourselves wishing to offer words of consolation to someone who has no faith. What can be said to these people?

I would say: “Look, I’m sorry that it is like this, because you have some sorrows that a person of faith does not have. But I respect your way of reasoning and your integrity, and this will save you.” Pressures are not necessary; indeed, they are useless. They do not serve any purpose, and they are counterproductive!

So many times, I find myself in this situation with parents who have this problem with their children: parents are practicing and believing, and the children never put a foot in the church because the influence of their environment, their friends and companions, is much stronger than the education they have received at home. But the education received in the family is deeply rooted, and for this reason, even after years, many return to practice of their Faith.

I recall a cartoon I saw some time ago in *Famiglia Cristiana* that was entitled “My Father and Me.” It was subdivided into four frames. In the first one, a baby says, “My father is my king; he is my everything; what he says for me is gospel!” In the second, an older child says, “My father has some faults. I cannot accept all that he says and teaches me!” In the third, an adult affirms: “My father is a disaster. I must live in a very different way from him.” In the last frame, the father has died, and the son says: “Ah, my father! What a great man!”

Well, after a while one retraces one’s steps. Certainly it is very important to know how to educate children, how to choose the most adaptable readings and the type of entertainment to watch, especially on television, which is within everyone’s reach. Now there

is the Internet, which can be even worse. It is necessary to teach your children to value friends, how to have good friendships, and how to judge whether a friendship is good.

Each person does what he can. Anyhow, it is necessary to educate children in the Faith from an early age, because often, when the original faith is weak, children take on surrogates. It is then that Eastern religions begin to attract them.

I have met so many persons who believe in reincarnation. Well, you can believe either in the resurrection or in reincarnation; you cannot believe in both, because they are absolutely incompatible! Those who do not see this believe in both. It is precisely because of their lack of faith that they find it necessary to fill this interior void with other religions and other experiences.

I recall a disagreement I had with a Jesuit who founded a school of transcendental meditation. If you are a Jesuit, you are supposed to teach meditation using the method of Saint Ignatius Loyola; that is the true meditation! Transcendental meditation is turning circles in one's head. Like yoga, it is a door that leads to Hinduism, yet so many are teaching it, even in Catholic schools!

At first, one is not aware of the danger in transcendental meditation. Going forward, one truly begins to distance oneself from Christianity and accept Hinduism.

Anyhow, I repeat that they are all situations that need to be taken one by one, step by step, by trying to look inside them, trying not to treat every problem like a matter of the greatest importance. The Gospel says to us: "Each tree is known by its fruit" (Luke 6:44); one needs to see the fruits of a cure.

Various sources say that confession is not valued by the faithful and perhaps not even by the priests. According to some, the loss of the sense of sin comes from lack of instruction about what is good and what is evil.

God has given us laws regarding good and evil: the Ten Commandments. Listening to the Word of God helps our conscience to understand them.

There is the negative law, the things not to do; and God's positive law. For example, on divorce: "Man must not divide what God has

united" (see Matt. 19:6). This is enough! This is Jesus' word; nothing else is necessary! On abortion: "Do not kill," the Fifth Commandment.

God has spoken, and He has also placed a conscience in our soul that instructs us per se. Seeing that we can form a bad conscience, a false conscience, however, God has come to our aid by giving us some positive and very precise laws: so in violating these laws, we commit sins, no doubt about it!

As for the sacrament of reconciliation, it is God's mercy applied to man, the sinner. Therefore, in the Creed we pray: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins"; that is, we recognize the sacrament of reconciliation. How could one oppose this sacrament? Solely through ignorance, egoism, and arrogance! "I confess to God." Bravo! Confessing a thousand times to God leaves one with his sins still attached! But if you go to a priest, even a priest in a state of sin, you confess your sins to him, and he absolves you; but it is Christ who absolves you. He has given the power to priests; they are the ones who have the power to remit sins.

Confession is the practical application of God's greatest mercy. There are many converts to Christianity and to Catholicism precisely because of the sacrament of reconciliation, whereas, in the other religions, there is no such sacrament. It is precisely the grace of the sacrament of reconciliation that destroys sins; God cancels them: He no longer keeps track of them! Naturally, it is a sacrament that requires the right intention; it requires repentance, which is logical. Therefore, it is useless for a person to go to confession if he does not wish to change.

I remember a joke about a wolf that went to confession because he had attacked some flocks and, while the priest was preaching, the wolf said: "Please, make it brief. I can hear the bleating!" He already wished to sink his teeth in the sheep again!

The Lord pardons us a thousand times a day for the same sin. He always pardons us; but each time He asks for repentance and a good intention. So many times, I have heard, "But Father, it is useless that I confess my sins, since I always fall again." Well, that doesn't matter: confess them again. Even if you fall again and again unto the end of your life, confessing each time, you must know that

because of your repeated genuine repentance and right intention, God's mercy has triumphed over you.

A priest, when he is hearing confession, has divine power, because only God can wipe away sins. When Jesus said to that paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," the people thought: "only God can remit sins." Then Jesus performed a visible miracle, the healing of the paralytic, to demonstrate that an invisible miracle had also occurred, the cancellation of sins. Jesus has given this power to priests and only to priests; do not confess to just anyone, to a friend or a confidant, but only to one who has the power to remit sin.

The sacrament of penance is a divine power because it is a power given by God. In the same way, the Mass is a divine power, when the priest says the words by means of which the host becomes the living Body of Christ, and the wine becomes the living Blood of Christ. It is a divine power, not a human power; no man can do this.

If the priest were truly to think about the powers that God has given him, how well he would perform his duties!

About confession . . .

I say that an adult should confess his sins at least once a month, better every fifteen days. But for young children or young people, it depends on their circumstances, on their predisposition to sin. For example, if a young person has the habit of masturbating, I say that he should confess it each time, even two or three times a day, because if the sinner always goes to the same confessor, he can be sure that he will be able to conquer that sin. Father Alberione, during the last years of his life, confessed his sins every evening. Each one knows the needs of his soul and conforms to them, but my advice is: go to confession, at the minimum, once a month.

I had a great friendship with Cardinal Lercaro. He was also a pastor and knew the needs of souls. Once he said to me, "Doesn't it seem that the Lord appreciates a monthly confession?" Naturally this is advice, not an obligation, to keep the soul clean. Because the more a person confesses, the more he is aware of his defects; the less he confesses, the less he sees them.

There is nothing worse than Easter-duty penitents: persons who confess only once a year, at Easter.

“When was your last confession?”

“At Easter, last year.”

“And what have you done?”

“Nothing, I haven’t done anything!”

Then the confessor begins the questions and discovers that, except for killing and stealing, he has done all the rest! So one can say that the more a person confesses, the more he knows himself — the more he knows his personal defects. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration for some saints to confess their sins every day — not because they consider themselves great sinners. No: it is to know themselves. If the Bible says: “The just sin seven times a day” (see Prov. 24:16), how many times a day do we, who are not just, sin in a day?

The priest receives powers to administer the sacraments when he is ordained a priest: in the ritual of the consecration of the priest, there is a consignment of powers — the handing over of the chalice and the host — to the one who will remit sins that will be remitted. In a discourse (I do not recall if it was public or private), John Paul II said: “The greatest gift that has been given to me is the priesthood, then, added to this, becoming bishop, cardinal, and pope; but nothing is worth the richness that was given to me when I was ordained a priest.”

The power of the bishop to ordain is a divine power, but when one is a priest, all the rest is relegated to second place. Priests should think about this; they should think about it seriously!

We know that God works directly in the sacraments. Is the priest aware that he is performing a divine act? Are the sacraments stronger if the priest is more aware?

Not at all: there is no difference, because the sacrament is given to benefit the faithful. For example, Saint Teresa of Avila had many flashes of inspiration from the Lord. There was a period of her life when she was forced, because there was no other possibility, to participate at the Mass of a priest whom she knew to be in the state of mortal sin and who celebrated the Mass as if he were writing a postcard. One day, while this priest was distributing Communion, the Lord permitted her to see the host that this priest had just

consecrated. The host was extremely luminous, while his hands were like coal. It demonstrated that everything done for the benefit of the faithful is valid.

It does not matter to the faithful if the priest believes or if he is prayerfully gifted: the Mass is always valid, even if the officiating priest is in the state of mortal sin.

So often I have heard someone say, “I make my confession to God. Why must I confess my sins to a man who is a sinner like me?” Because that man, sinner like or greater than you, has from God the power to absolve you, while an angel and even Our Lady do not have this power. Let’s suppose that Our Lady appears to you. You confess your sins to her, and then she says, “My child, go to a priest, who can absolve your sins.” Even Saint Michael the Archangel, who is the head of the celestial hosts, cannot consecrate [bread and wine] or hear your confession, while a priest in the state of mortal sin can, because it is for the good of the faithful, not for the honor of the priest. The priest does things that benefit the faithful!

What is different about a sacramental, where the sanctity of the priest is very important? The exorcistate is one of these fundamental cases.

Yes, yes, there is no doubt that there is a difference. In the sacraments, God is acting, but a sacramental depends on the faith of the person. Let us consider a simple act: making the sign of the cross with blessed water. If it is done with faith, it has great value; if it is done without thinking about it, out of habit, it is not worth anything.

There is a robust difference between a sacrament and a sacramental: exorcism is a sacramental, for which the faith of the exorcist and the faith of the person receiving the exorcism are necessary. Faith is also necessary for those who participate in the exorcism — relatives who support the person and those assisting the priest exorcist — because it is important for those present to give efficacy to the sacramental. It is also very important that the person receiving the exorcism find persons to pray for him. For example, there are cloistered monasteries whose members pray at the moment an exorcism occurs. It is important: they all help to give efficacy to this sacramental. If it is done or received badly, or only to

please a relative or a parent, then it is better to avoid it, because it will not have any efficacy. Before proceeding, it is necessary to prepare the person to receive it correctly.

Also, in the confessional, many times, it is necessary to prepare persons for repentance and pardon. The pardon is especially important. Once a father came to confess. His daughter had been murdered by a brute. He said to me, "How can I pardon him? How can I forgive the one who even boasts of what he has done?" And I said to him: "My dear son, it is in your interest to pardon him because if you do not pardon him, God will not pardon you. You are confessing, and I am absolving you; but if you do not pardon, the absolution that you receive is not worth anything."

There is, relevant to this, that beautiful parable of the worker who owed his master a large debt, which was forgiven; but then he took by the neck a colleague who owed him a small amount and put him in jail. So then the master took back his pardon.

At times, forgiveness is called the eighth sacrament. It is extremely important!

There are sins that are considered less serious than others, such as gluttony.

There are, however, different degrees of overeating. There is the person with a sweet tooth, a simple venality, and then there is the voracious eater, a true glutton, who ruins his health. It is a matter of degrees. When a person is a slave to food, a slave to overindulgence, who gains weight and becomes obese and then sick, who neglects to care for his health, he is committing the sin of gluttony; and it can have serious consequences.

Often eating is a compensation for unresolved problems, as it is with smoking. For example, many people smoke and are damaged by it. Smoking, like overeating, is compensation for other things. But they are all false compensations, because they create new ties without resolving the initial problems. These vices enter on tiptoe and soon become masters that lead you into slavery!

Continuing with the topic of gluttony, bulimia is considered by some an extraordinary action of the Devil.

Well, demons can cause physical disturbances, and bulimia could be part of them; but it could also be an intervention of the Devil. These cases also need prayers, the sacraments, and blessings. Very often blessings are enough, and exorcisms are not necessary. But be careful. If there is the possibility that it could be a satanic intervention, a person might, out of laziness, permit it to become an excuse not to combat it personally. In fact, personal efforts are always necessary, because the Lord never rewards laziness. We see certain saints whose penances seem extreme to us. Here in Rome, it is enough to visit the rooms of Saint Vincent Pallotti to observe the hair cloths and the nails — such stuff!

If you go to the Valenza Hill to see the rooms of Mother Speranza, you will also see some incredible things. You might ask yourself: “How did they do it? How could they?” Well, saints wish to dominate their bodily passions, and some use extraordinary means that certainly are not advisable for everyone! Monsignor Olgiati, the right hand of Father Gemelli, who was the great confessor of the students at Catholic University, called “exercises for the will” the small mortifications, little voluntary privations, and small sacrifices that we make. As children, we were accustomed to making small sacrifices, but as adults we no longer make them. But these exercises — these offerings of small sacrifices — strengthen the will in a way that prepares it for big challenges, those that cost a lot.

If a person neglects small sacrifices, then quickly he goes to ruin. He who takes proper care of little things grows and grows.

In the sexuality of the Christian couple, evil inserts itself in many ways, through readings, through companions, and through the passions that are within. Evil tries to insert itself in many ways, as does the good; therefore, it is necessary to make good triumph over evil. And if one succeeds, it is solely with the grace of God, solely with the grace of God! Evil inserts itself in so many ways; the important thing is to recognize it and to combat it; if it is recognized but not combated, it becomes even greater, since, like all vices, it enters on tiptoe and then becomes dominant.

At the beginning, one cigarette a week is enough; then five a day is not enough. At the beginning, one’s wife is enough; then how many lovers are necessary? Solomon had seven hundred wives, but at the

end of his life, he was a poor man. With all his intelligence and all his knowledge, he could not abide by the Sixth Commandment. And the result? His son lost the kingdom!

Generally, one thinks that people who have need of an exorcist are the ignorant, the simpletons; and that the cultured are above these things.

I have had every type of person. Certainly, when a person comes to us, he has already been humbled; otherwise he would not seek an exorcist. I have known so many cases of persons who very likely are possessed by the Devil, but they do not wish to have anyone know that they have approached a priest. They remain as they are; they prefer to remain like this! When one has the humility to approach a priest, the person is already at a good place.

I say that if a nonpracticing person comes to us exorcists, he is already favorably disposed to accept our counsel; more so, for example, than anyone who would seek counsel from a parish priest. The exorcist's work of leading souls to God is much easier than the work of other priests, because it is not we exorcists who seek persons who are spiritually afflicted; it is they who come looking for us. Therefore, they are disposed to listen to us.

There are no cultural or occupational environments that foster a greater or lesser likelihood of possessions or vexations. I would say that they are all on the same level.

What advice would you give to priests?

Read the Gospel; believe in the Gospel!

And again, read the Gospel; believe in the Gospel!

In the Gospel, there is everything!

In the Word of God, there is everything.

It is necessary, however, to believe it — to read it and to believe it.

I give the example of exorcisms: Jesus did exorcisms, and He gave the power to do exorcisms. But why do so many priests and bishops not believe? Yet it is written there in the Gospel!

With the passing of time, through carrying out exorcisms, does an exorcist undergo personal changes?

Experience always has advantages. Thinking of past exorcisms, we become aware that there were some things we could have done better, if we had been aware of them, but then they were unknown. Therefore, experience does some good. But the experience that helps the most is always that of understanding that humility and faith are the two principal qualities necessary to any exorcist. Humility and faith, because the one who acts is the Lord; the exorcist is a good-for-nothing and remains a good-for-nothing!

The risk for the exorcist is that he may become arrogant because he is sought after, because he knows that he is loved and therefore a little spoiled by the people, sometimes even cheered; and then there is the risk that he may become attached to these deleterious attitudes. If the exorcist has some good results, it is solely the Lord's accomplishment, and the merit is solely His. There is no need to attribute to oneself what depends on God.

I would say that, with the passing of time, the practice of exorcism will increase, above all, in that first important phase, which is discernment: determining whether an afflicted person truly has some of the characteristics of an evil spell for which an exorcism is necessary, or whether the evils are of another nature, as it is in most cases.

Most often there are no evil spells, but one blesses the person anyway, because blessings do good even in illnesses that are not spiritual in nature. Therefore, the exorcist proceeds with the blessing knowing that he is not dealing with a possession or a demonic presence; rather, he finds himself before a natural situation. This influences the prayers that he chooses and the number of appointments he will grant, because the people would come often, even continuously. An experienced exorcist understands who needs to come weekly, who needs to come once a month, and who needs to come three or four times a year. With others, he concentrates on stimulating their spiritual lives, encouraging them to pray and to receive the sacraments, to do good works, and to experience heartfelt forgiveness.

The Gospel says to give heartfelt forgiveness. I have often been asked what this means. I offer the example of Paul VI when he was in the Philippines. During his visit, there was an attempt on his life by

a knife-wielding assailant. The pope's protectors immediately blocked the attack. Then Paul VI went to Australia. On his return, he made another stop in the Philippines. The head of state again apologized for that incident. The pope responded, "I have pardoned him, and I have forgotten it."

Here we have an example of heartfelt forgiveness: forgiven and forgotten, as if it had never happened! Thus, when there are no evil spells, the exorcist must offer the person this type of spiritual guidance.

On the other hand, a person is never sent a burden greater than he can sustain.

It is so; no one has a burden that is beyond his strength! This year, during the Christmas season, I was listening to Radio Maria, and I heard some stupendous preaching. I always say that Mariology is my subject, but I understand that I have so much to learn. For example, a homily struck me because it demonstrated, irrefutably, how Mary's faith was greater than Abraham's faith, precisely because God asked more of her than He asked of Abraham. For both there is the concept: "Nothing is impossible for God." For Abraham, it concerns having a son late in life with a sterile wife; for Mary, being a virgin and a mother. They both believed. They believed! With closed eyes and without knowing how, they believed.

To both, God gives a son, and then to one He says, "Kill your son"; to the other, "Your son will be killed."

Abraham believes and, when he raises the knife to kill his son, God stops him: Halt! "I have seen that you have great faith, I have seen that you were ready to sacrifice your son for me." So God stopped him, and asked Abraham for nothing more.

But of Mary he asked for the death of her Son and the burial of her Son, after having made her listen to His cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Yet she continued to believe: even with Jesus dead, she continued to believe. Abraham did not see the death of his son; the Lord did not ask it of him. Therefore, Mary's faith is greater than that of Abraham. Oh, what faith!

I also believe something else, but I have not yet expressed it, because it needs to be studied. Mary is present at all the works of her Son — at the Incarnation, during his public ministry. She follows Him, and she listens to everything . . . at the Crucifixion and at the Passion and death. She is always present!

I say, could she not also have been present at the Resurrection? In what way, I do not know; it must be studied! I say that she could not have been missing at something so important, because the entire life of Jesus ends in the Resurrection.

The Incarnation, the preaching, the Passion, everything finishes with the Resurrection, and for us who hope in the resurrection, it ends, indeed, in the certainty of resurrection, because the victory of Jesus over death involves all of us!

The victory over death, the victory over the corruption of the flesh, occurred because Jesus rose with His glorious body, and then we also will rise with a glorious body!

The resurrection goes against the condemnation that God gave Adam: “If you eat of it, you will die”: there was not yet a resurrection! “You are dust and to dust you shall return”: there could not have been a glorious and perfect body!

Saint Paul says: “We live in a corruptible body and we will rise in an incorruptible body” (see 1 Cor. 15:42).

So, after the angels closed the terrestrial Paradise, Jesus opened Heaven again. God gives us the victory over death, the victory over the corruption of the body, and the victory of entering Heaven — that is, Paradise; they are all events in which Mary participated and therefore witnessed.

After so many years of exorcism, what message do you have for bishops and priests?

Read the Gospel!

And to your exorcist confreres?

Apply the Gospel, act with complete humility, knowing that everything depends on God; do not consider yourself capable of anything!

How do you view yourself?

I am humble, humble, humble — and I boast of it!

What do you consider your greatest quality?

I have none.

Perhaps recognizing that I have none is a quality. I recognize that I am nothing. Then, if the Lord uses me to serve Him, having me do many good things, that is to His merit.

And your worst defect?

Arrogance.

Like everyone, there is always a temptation to pride — that is my principal defect. There are many others, but I won't mention them.

It is hard to understand how a person who claims to have the great gift of not being worth anything can also be proud.

Well, it is because the demon is clever. . . . For example, the other day, I preached to my prayer group, and it seemed to go well. At the end, I had this great desire to hear someone tell me that, so I asked some of the participants, "Did you like my presentation?" Hearing someone say, "You were great!" satisfied my pride, and when I confessed that week, I confessed that I was so proud!

Also, after the airing of *Porta a Porta*, I asked, masking my intention a bit, "Did it seem to any of you that I made my point well?" This was so I could hear them say to me: "You were really terrific!"

We are all children of Adam and Eve!

Then there is gluttony.

I am gluttonous.

Now, I cannot overindulge, because I am not well, but otherwise I am a glutton.

In effect, I have defects galore!

Do you have regrets?

Many, many, many.

My life is a journey of regrets, for the good things I could have done and for my laziness, for the things that I did not do. I have had so many missed opportunities, things I could have accomplished but didn't. It is not for nothing that the sins of omission are the most recorded in the Gospel of Matthew on the Last Judgment: "I was

hungry, and you gave me no food. I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink” (Matt. 25:42). “You did not . . . you did not . . .” — all are sins of omission, and there are so many, many, many! Out of laziness, out of indolence, I let time pass, and then I had no more time!

Have you ever regretted having chosen the priestly life?

Never!

If I think about it, I am moved!

I entered the Society of Saint Paul, and I have never regretted it!

Feeling myself unworthy, yes, but regrets, no!

When I entered the priesthood, I had a spiritual director who said to me: “Look, I don’t feel worthy of the priesthood, but I also don’t feel worthy of renouncing it! If they give it to me, I accept it, but I am not asking for it. However it is, I thank the Lord!”

My father had already died when I informed my family that I wished to become a priest, but I remember once as a child, everyone was at the table and someone said: “I’m thinking of becoming a priest,” and my father responded: “I would be very content if one of you became a priest!” When I told my mother that I would be leaving and not returning, in order to enter the Society of Saint Paul, she immediately said to me, “Papa would have been very content!”

Father Gabriele, did you understand what God had in mind for you?

Well, I think that the Lord was served by me in the realization of His plans, especially in my two great enterprises: the consecration of Italy to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and then the relaunching in the universal Church of the ministry of exorcism. There is no doubt that these are His work! The rest were normal priestly tasks: confessions, preaching, et cetera.

Father Gabriele, from 1986 to 2009 — that is, until the age of eighty-four — you faithfully practiced exorcism. Then illness stopped you abruptly. Later you took it up again but at a reduced pace, as much as your health permitted. Certainly it was not easy when you had to stop.

Lord, let Your will be done! Complete serenity!

I'm sorry for all the people who telephone and are informed I cannot help: for them I'm sorry. These days, I help a bit those I already know, but I do not feel like taking on new cases. This is the problem: we exorcists in Rome are overburdened. We are no longer able to take on other cases, and there is so much need.

What about priestly celibacy?

I have remained completely satisfied being a priest; I have never felt as if I was missing something. If you knew how many crushes I had as a young person — so many! But I have always held them at bay, barred their way, because from the age of eleven, there was in me this subconscious idea of the priesthood, so I did not wish to deceive anyone.

Even up to the last moment — even when I entered — I said to myself: “My choice is not in theory between celibacy and marriage; my choice is between celibacy and marrying with that person there!” It was a specific choice, because I had my eye on a person who is still living, and I am convinced that if I had married, I would have married her.

But, frankly, it is much easier never to break the Sixth Commandment than to correct oneself after having fallen! Let me offer a clarification: celibacy has never burdened me at all! It never burdened me when I was young, because I was always at a distance, because I was thinking that if I became a priest, it would have been better not to disillusion anyone. I recall a friend who was studying medicine; I saw him in the courtyard reading some of his fiancée's letters, and then suddenly, he discovered his vocation and entered the Society of Saint Paul.

There are people who do not understand anything, those who argue that priests should be able to marry, because there are married priests, for example, among the Orthodox sects. But there are many divorces among the Orthodox, even among the consecrated.

When one does not marry, one does not think of marriage, or of the marriage act, or of having children; one does not think about them at all. I have also seen many separations among ex-priests who have married. I recall a confrere who was not yet ordained; he left before

he completed his studies, and he got married, but to this day he says: "If one of you is in crisis and wishes to marry, come see me; I will persuade you to continue!"

And obedience?

Obedience is also proper for the laity, according to their situation. Obedience to the laws of God is required for everyone. Relationships can also require obedience: an employee must obey his supervisor, a child his parents, a citizen the laws. If laws were not respected, there would be chaos.

Obedience also depends on practical situations in which one finds oneself. Each woman is viewed with parity. Once it was said that the wife must obey the husband, but today the two must come to an agreement. A religious even more must obey his or her rule and superiors.

A layman must be attentive to his spiritual director, who is a counselor, but the spiritual director must not command, and neither should priests. The Lord created us free and wishes that we exercise our liberty. One must always consider counsel as advice, never as orders to be obeyed!

For the consecrated religious, it is easy enough to obey the rule and the superiors. Certainly some submissions are difficult, such as when a priest must obey the bishop when he is transferred from one parish to another that is less important.

What effect does a superior who follows someone from the beginning of his priestly journey have?

None in particular, poor misfortunate superiors! Poor things!

I recall that once a superior general of the Jesuits came to preach a retreat, which was relevant to the difficulty of being a superior today. He said to us: "If I sense that a confrere wishes to be a superior, I immediately call a psychiatrist!" Superiors must confront great problems; they must also consider how to treat a novice or a new priest, or a confrere who is decidedly older than they are. When you age, it happens that some sometimes your spiritual sons or daughters are placed over you as your superior. I have had various young superiors whom I have addressed with the familiar form of the verb, and they responded to me using the formal.

Do you fear death?

I always say, "Lord, You have brought me to this age; my life has already passed! Thank You!" There is a psalm that says: "The life of a man is seventy years, and if he is robust, eighty" (see Ps. 90:10). I have passed both ages, so I am okay. I thank God for the way He has permitted me to spend my years, long and well. All the rest is extra. I shall live as long as the Lord wishes, which means I am not finished.

There are so many missions in life, including those of prayer and suffering. As for an exorcist, he can stop doing exorcisms and dedicate himself to something else, and when he can no longer do anything else, he can pray. Our founder, Father Alberione, always said that the first apostolate was suffering, then prayer, and then in third place the active apostolate, each according to his inclinations.

Have you had remorse?

I would not know how to define gross spiritual difficulties. I would say that I have often sacrificed prayer for the apostolate, thinking that it was necessary. I recall a Christmas Eve. I was at Alba, and there were no confessors, so I slipped into a confessional and remained there all morning, afternoon, and evening, up until Mass at midnight: I heard confessions for more than eleven hours. It was not a good choice to sacrifice my prayers, because prayer is the oil that enables us to keep going. Of this, I have remorse.

Have you never felt hunted by those seeking an exorcist?

I have been very sought after; there have been so many people who have struggled to see me, but here at Saint Paul I have always felt protected.

This discernment, of which so much is spoken — what exactly is it?

Discernment is the intellectual perception with which the exorcist decides whether a person has an evil spell or a natural illness. Naturally, discernment is for exorcists. For medical doctors, it is the understanding of the nature of an illness.

I entrust myself to prayer, and then I observe the person's reactions toward blessings, prayers, and exorcisms. But very often

without exorcisms, one fails to make discernment, because the demon is astute and hides himself, and only the exorcist can force him to manifest himself. But sometimes, solely by listening to the person, an exorcist understands whether it is an evil spell.

Vexation and diabolical obsession are often accompanied by problems of a psychiatric nature, in which case it is sometimes necessary to seek the help of both a medical doctor and an exorcist. It is easier to understand disturbances of an evil type if the evil is external, such as noises in the house, lamps that turn on and turn off, and doors that open and close. Then it is easier to understand that they are not natural things, especially when they are accompanied by disturbances to a person, usually in the stomach and the head.

In my opinion, spiritual illnesses are more serious than physical ones, because physical illnesses have at least the comfort of a diagnosis, of cures that, even if they are at times ineffective, are medical cures. In the case of spiritual evils, the afflicted are often not believed by anyone — medical doctors, family, or priest. I believe that this is the greatest suffering. It is difficult to find a priest willing to help. The great help, however, comes from the sacraments and from prayer — that is, from grace.

Father Amorth, is there anything you wish to add as we approach the end of our conversation?

No, I have nothing to add. It seems to me that I have been drained. Let us thank the Lord. Let us thank the Lord, and let us pray to Him. Let us pray to Him always!

Everything happens through God's mercy.

I have so much faith that our God loves us immensely and that the principal characteristic of His love is that of mercy. As he taught little Saint Thérèse, His love is a merciful love. The more misery there is, the more one bows down to be raised up.

I say to the Lord so often, "You are Father, You are God the Father, You are good, You are kind, You are humble, You humbled Yourself, and You sacrificed Your Son on the Cross."

The more I think of Christ's Passion, the more horrible it is to me, especially in the Gospel of Mark, in which Jesus, having just been

captured, ceases to be a man and becomes a puppet to whom they do everything they wish!

And just a little before that, He had given Himself as food . . . and then there is this continuity in the Mass. In the Mass there is everything!

And then I think that God is eternal, and that the Passion of Christ continues forever.

One day, a woman said to Padre Pio, "Father, I understand that my sufferings are not comparable to those of Jesus; His, however, lasted three hours." He looked at her with an air of compassion and said to her, "Do you not understand that God is crucified until the end of the world?"

Christ is on the Cross until the end of the world, and in the Mass we make His Passion present: there is the sacrifice, and there is the sacrament that becomes our food.

"Who eats of me remains in me and I in him" (see John 6:56): an abiding presence that lasts forever.

Then there is His presence in the tabernacle for perpetual adoration.

In God there is no past, present, or future; in Him there is an eternal present!

When I have a little bit of a disturbance, I think of the Passion of Christ and I say, "Lord, do to me what You wish!" But then I think, "Do not do what You did to Your Son, however! Yes, I am also Your son, but I am weak. I have tender and slight shoulders!"

We always open our encounters with a prayer, and we conclude them with a benediction.

I shall give the blessing that I asked of Father Candido, because it is how we always blessed each other, he and I:

That the Lord Jesus may always be with you, walk before you in order to guide you, be behind you in order to protect you, dwell within you in order to keep you, be above you in order to enlighten you. Amen.

I, however, do it in Latin because the demons fear Latin more than the spoken languages: it could be because Latin is the language of the Church!

Dominus noster Jesus Christus, apud nos sit ut nos defendat, intra nos sit ut nos conservet, ante nos sit ut nos ducat, post nos sit ut nos custodiat, super nos sit ut nos benedicat, liberet et sanctificet. Qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivit et regnat in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

¹ Monsignor Corrado Balducci (1923–2008), theologian, demonologist, exorcist, and author of books on exorcism and other topics.

² Celio is a district of Rome that includes the Basilica of Saints John and Paul near Saint John Lateran known for the underground presence of the beautifully frescoed ancient Roman home of the Christian Roman senator Pammachio (later venerated as a saint), which he offered to the Church at the end of the fourth century for the building of the basilica of the martyred saints John and Paul.

³ When William Friedkin made his 1973 classic, *The Exorcist*, he had never seen an exorcism. Decades later, on May 1, 2016, in Rome, Friedkin was permitted to film as Father Amorth fought to expel Satan from an Italian woman. Apparently, an exception was made for this occasion.

⁴ At the time of these conversations, Father Amorth was often present as a guest on this very popular Marian radio network.

⁵ Father Matteo La Grua (1914–2012) was an Italian Roman Catholic priest and exorcist of the Franciscan Order and author of several books on exorcism, including *The Prayer of Liberation*.

⁶ Pellegrino Maria Ernetti (1925–1994) was a Benedictine priest and exorcist from Venice, a musician, scientist, and author of books on music theory.

⁷ Monsignor Milingo, a controversial archbishop and exorcist, was dismissed from the clerical state in 2009.

⁸ Father Amorth is referring to his first three books published for Edizioni Dehoniane.

⁹ See his testimony in the second part of this book.

¹⁰ See *Paradiso*, canto 3, v. 85. “Each one is in the will of God, in the place that God assigns him” and so “in His will is our peace.”

Part 2

Testimonies of Those Who Were Close to Father
Amorth

Father Stanislaw, Spiritual Son and Student of Father Amorth

How did you come to know Father Gabriele?

There was always a feeling of goodwill between Father Gabriele and me. I felt an enormous empathy for him from that day when, out of curiosity, I first went to the Church of Santa Maria Immacolata to understand how the Devil could act in the life of each one of us. When I read in the Gospel: "Jesus said to his apostles: Go and, in my name, cast out demons," I was very upset and dubious, and I asked myself: "Yes, I believe the Devil exists, but how can he take possession of a body?" I did not believe it, and the doubt tormented me.

So I decided to get some direct experience. A confrere advised me to go to Father Gabriele, urging me to ask for a special blessing.

So I went, and I was struck by his joyful expression and his warm reception. He already knew that I was a Passionist, and he embraced me. He was happy to have an extra priest — a Passionist no less — to help him with the prayers. From that day forward, I began my journey next to him.

For me, it was a privilege to work alongside him, a priest respected by other priests and by the persons he received. Evidently, he had a special vocation, a calling by God to carry out such a ministry and for so many years. Father Amorth felt an immediate empathy for me, also, because he had a special tie with the Passionists, going back to when Cardinal Ugo Poletti had appointed him to work alongside Father Candido Amantini, the well-known exorcist at the Scala Santa in Rome.

Father Candido was, from that moment, his teacher and his trusted brother. One day, the saintly charismatic confided to him, "My trusted brother in Christ, I wish you to have this mandate after me, because you must take care of the souls that I am now looking after."

I do not know how to explain it, but nearly from the first day of my collaboration with Father Gabriele, he told me many times that he saw in me the priest sent by Mary to succeed him. He said to me, "I want you to take my place when I am no longer here." For this

reason, he tried in every way to obtain an official mandate from the Diocese of Rome, but he was unsuccessful because of my youth. Then — through Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone — he obtained the right to have me as his collaborator, but nothing more; so when he stopped working, I had to stop also.

Perhaps someone at the top of the ecclesial hierarchy thought that I shared Father Amorth's opinion that bishops who do not nominate exorcists are living in mortal sin. In fact, on this I am in total agreement with him, and he always said it openly without too many scruples. Clearly, his speaking directly made him dangerous for the men of the Church who did not believe in the extraordinary action of the Devil.

For me, he was a life model, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta, with whom I had worked among the poor. But I must say that the material or physical poverty that I have seen in the hospital or in the streets takes second place to the spiritual poverty that I see in afflicted individuals.

I heard someone say that it is better to have a serious illness than to be struck by an evil spell, because you can confront an illness with cures and speak of it openly, but with a spiritual illness, which is a mystery, you cannot speak of it or you risk being taken for a crazy person. We know that the Devil is the prince of liars; therefore, understanding something about him is difficult.

Apart from your specific case, why is there so much difficulty in naming new exorcists? Don't you see in this the imprint of the Devil?

In 1970, the great pope Paul VI affirmed that “through some fissure, the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God [the Church].”

Let us think, for example, back to the Year of the Priest, 2009–2010. It was a terrible time. The pope proclaimed it, asking for prayers for the Church and for priests. From the moment it began, there followed a series of attacks, one after the other, that brought to light every sort of wickedness. I do not know if it was a necessary purification obtained by the prayers of the faithful or a diabolical work intended to distance from the Church those vacillating in their faith. Beyond every doubt, there remains the certainty that God, much to

our good fortune, knows how to write straight on the crooked lines of history.

How was your rapport with Father Amorth?

Our rapport was so profound that when he saw me, he would say that he felt strong. On my part, I never abandoned him, not even in difficult moments, much less in the last years, when he was very tired and worn out, and he did not always manage to say the prayers. He leaned on me a great deal, and I was proud of his trust in me, of the good that he wished for me; and I returned it completely. For me, it was a great grace to know him.

During the exorcisms, it was enough to look in each other's eyes to understand one another and to enter into the problem that was in the person being exorcised. He would say to me that, in his ministry, I was a great help to him because, according to him, I had some charisms granted to me by God, enabling me to perceive in which part of the body the person had been struck.

Does it frighten you to “know” without understanding what is happening?

Honestly, no, because I am aware that it is a totally gratuitous grace, independent of me. I am only an instrument in the hands of God.

Notwithstanding my fragility and my poverty, I try always to live in God's grace, and this is enough for me. I am certain that God is with me and that Mary is close to me; therefore, what more could I desire?

Through this ministry, I have been able to experience the fullness of my priesthood and the beauty of my vocation; even more, direct contact with the great suffering of the sick in spirit has made me more attentive to the needs of these brothers and sisters, inspiring me to love them and to stand next to them.

Perhaps it is because of the concern that I demonstrate toward these brethren that the Lord has given me the grace of discernment.

In all sincerity, I do not know in what way I manage to figure out whether a person has a psychological or a spiritual problem; I only know that it happens.

About diagnosis, what do you think of the instructions that some charismatics give to discover the origin of evil spells?

I prefer to avoid the diagnosis of the charismatics, because most of the time they are not charismatics at all!

Sometimes it happens that someone will come to us saying, "That person told me that an evil spell has been cast on me by . . ." I never consider these affirmations. Often they are said by charlatans or by workers of iniquity, aimed at increasing the hatred and resentment of the suffering poor toward relatives and acquaintances.

But then, it is also necessary to consider that even authentic charismatics can err.

Forgiveness, as all exorcists know, is the determining factor that leads to a definitive liberation!

What does it mean to forgive?

The Lord teaches us that it is necessary to love our enemies, and He invites us to pray for those who have done us harm, blessing them. To forgive is to break the spiral of evil, based on the example of Jesus, the Suffering Servant.

Forgiveness is an expression of love and a gift of God!

When one lives in the love of God, there is no place for rancor; if the love in us is perfect, then each suffering offered up becomes grace.

All this does not mean that forgiveness is simple. On the contrary, to forgive can mean undertaking a long and painful journey. Painful, yes, but fruitful; and how many extraordinary graces forgiving obtains!

Do you consider yourself a spiritual son of Father Amorth?

Yes, I am his spiritual son! Father Gabriele has been my support in the most difficult moments of this ministry, and still today he is an important point of reference for my priestly life: a true model, even if he was never my confessor. The experience I had with him was truly wished by God; this mission as exorcist was not in my thoughts and not even in my desires!

Why spiritual father but not confessor?

Sometimes the two figures coincide, but I tend to differentiate between them, as suggested by a certain Church tradition. The spiritual father can direct the soul to a greater conformity with Christ. He must be able to feel free to speak. For this reason, it would be inopportune for one to be bound by the seal of the confessional.

In your view, is it good for a layman to have a spiritual guide? Is it better to have only a confessor, or can he confess to whomever he encounters?

The spiritual guide is always necessary. On the spiritual journey, one does not grow alone: man always has need of a person to guide him, to enlighten him, to help him progress in the ways of the spirit. The spiritual father must know our journey; he must have a rather precise picture of who we are. On the other hand, the confessor does not have to know us.

Tell me about your first experiences with Father Gabriele.

Once, a family asked him to go with them to their house, where some strange phenomena were occurring. I had just begun to help him. I had no experience, and I was a little perplexed that they could be having strange things happening in their homes. So naturally he sent me! It seemed that he was doing it on purpose, to challenge my incredulity!

I went with a young man who had a strong prayer life. While I was climbing the stairs to enter this house, I perceived a terrible physical heaviness, like a wind that was pushing me back. Just as I entered the front door, all the chairs around the table fell to the floor, and from the ceiling pieces of paper with strange names written on them began to fall. During the benediction, the person began to vomit some pins, which surely had not come from her stomach; rather they materialized in a dense saliva as it came out of her mouth.

Were you afraid?

No, I was not afraid.

But if you were so inexpert, finding yourself before such strange phenomena . . .

I was not afraid, because Father Amorth sent me, and with his mandate I felt secure.

Also, before the exorcism, I had experienced the power of the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Nothing is granted to Satan when a person has the protection of the Most Holy Virgin.

In my religious life, I have always given particular value to the consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. I have experienced true beauty in these devotions, and their importance and efficacy have intensified since I have begun this ministry.

Father Amorth often told us that when Cardinal Poletti informed him that he would have to help Father Candido in his ministry of exorcism, he, being a young priest without experience in this matter and not wishing to be disobedient, turned to the Virgin Mary and said to her, "My Lady, I place myself under your mantle; help me." From then, Mary never abandoned him, above all in the moment of difficulties.

Often during exorcisms, I consecrate the person being assisted to Our Lady: his person, his possessions, his work, his family, his friends, everything; and I have noted that it provokes, on the one side, enormous reactions and desperation from Satan and, on the other, great benefits to the person afflicted by him.

It is difficult to explain the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a few words. Perhaps the best phrase is the one John Paul II loved to repeat: "All yours" (*Totus Tuus*). It is like saying: "Mama, I consecrate myself to you unconditionally, all my being, all my possessions, and all my actions. Do with me what you wish."

To consecrate one's life to Mary means to offer all one's actions, each day, to Mary; to live each day with Mary and for Mary, thinking of her and how she would act in this moment if she were in our place, making the same choices she would make even if they would be painful or contrary to our will.

Father Luke Cirimotić, a Monfortan priest, wrote: "The spirituality of consecration is a progressive journey. With this consecration we seek to conform ourselves to Mary, to her sanctity, and to her virtues, which are modeled on the sanctity of Jesus. With Mary and as Mary, we consecrate ourselves to the Heart of Christ, which means to be

like Him, perfect before the Heavenly Father. Finally, we consecrate ourselves to the Father, so that we may love as God loves, even to giving our life for this love.”

Asking for Our Lady’s intercession and placing everything under her spotless mantle brings us securely to God’s door.

For those who struggle against the forces of evil, day by day, she is the breath of life and the source of faith in her celebrated announcement at Fatima: “In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph.”

How has your encounter with Father Gabriele changed you?

He fortified my life; he convinced me of the necessity and importance of spiritual combat.

Before my encounter with Father Gabriele, I took everything lightly. It was only afterward, when I confronted the suffering that I experienced in the ministry of reconciliation and liberation, that I realized one cannot listen, counsel, and guide a person based solely on knowledge acquired from theological studies. These can help, yes, but at a certain point, it is necessary to entrust oneself to God and to ask in prayer for light from the Lord. Father Gabriele helped me to understand the extreme importance of living the life of faith through prayer and through an encounter with our brothers and sisters. He often recommended, “Try to be yourself and speak of yourself to others. Don’t ever be afraid of being judged. When you are in the truth, never be afraid! Be alert, because you will be attacked continuously, as I am.”

Have you experienced many attacks within the Church?

Very many! Some were communicated to me through Father Gabriele, as, for example, when some bishops, not knowing of the permission I had obtained from Cardinal Bertone to assist him, thought it was their duty to ask him to inform them in writing who had authorized me to do this work!

What impressed you most about Father Gabriele?

One of the greatest gifts that Father Gabriele possessed was his extraordinary sensitivity. In personal discussions he never lost an opportunity to open his heart, sharing with sympathy and simplicity

events in his life that left an indelible mark on the memory of those listening to them.

As a true man of God, he took to heart the sufferings of so many who turned to him and his ministry, at times during the darkest moments of their lives. When he exorcized, he understood that that martyred and suffering body belonged, in every respect, to a creature of God, and that even before it needed effective therapy, it needed care and love. His rapport with so many who entrusted themselves to his ministry was anything but cold and detached. Father Gabriele was above all a father.

Nurturing such sentiments of spiritual paternity is fundamental when one is involved with persons wounded in spirit and body. Such persons need all the follow-up and attention that their cases require. A once-a-month appointment for an exorcism, however, is almost nothing.

I am convinced that before beginning a path of liberation, it is fundamental to have an in-depth discussion with the afflicted person. An attentive analysis of his past and present always reveals important details that are helpful for good spiritual discernment. As one knows, the human psyche is a real mystery, and at times it plays ugly tricks. For this reason, I believe that repeated discussions with the afflicted person are necessary to comprehend the true substance of the problem.

This discernment must be done with great attention, never superficially. The responsibilities toward those who turn to us exorcist priests are enormous. For example, if a person with psychological problems is entrusted to an exorcist and treated like a person with a spiritual illness rather than being directed toward specialized medical cures, he could be doubly ruined. The mental illness would persist, and to that would be added the conviction of having a spiritual problem.

Father Gabriele has often confirmed my conclusions. He always willingly listened to me and demonstrated great esteem toward me — esteem that, I must emphasize, I still consider unmerited.

For example, when he cited me in his books, praising me, I always responded: “Dear Father Gabriele, I am a simple priest, learning from you how to help my neighbor.”

During exorcisms, from time to time I saw him raise his eyes in my direction, in search of a consensus, of a discernment of the person being assisted. It might seem strange for a veteran of his caliber, with twenty years of experience exorcising, but Father Gabriele was humble and always open to direction because he was a man of God.

Let us not forget his great love for Mary, the humble woman par excellence, toward whom he nurtured an extraordinary devotion — a devotion he shared with his famous master, the charismatic Father Candido Amantini, also much in love with Mary.

Father Gabriele had a certain feeling for charismatics. Some sought him out, looking for help in discernment; others sustained him during decisive moments of his vocational journey — among them, his spiritual father, Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, and Father Candido; truly, they have never stopped helping him!

Do you miss working with him?

Yes, so much. When he began to decline, he said to me that if God stopped him, it was His plan and we had to respect His will. But today he is extraordinarily active. I must say that, during exorcisms, he makes more noise dead than he did when he was alive. In my prayers, I always invoke Father Gabriele and Father Candido, my two teachers; they are next to me, they sustain me, and they help and guide me. And they are continuing their battle against the unclean spirits with the same determination that they had when they were here on earth.

Speak to me of Anna, the girl sent to you some time ago.

Anna is a young woman from Southern Italy; her situation is extremely serious. I was the only priest who could assist Father Gabriele at her exorcism. Indeed, this girl had some very violent reactions whenever there were priests or laity present at the exorcisms who were not in a perfect state of grace with God, either because they were in the state of sin or because they neglected the sacrament of penance. She became agitated and her physical pains increased if she was in the company of persons in the state of sin.

Father Gabriele said to me: “Father Stanislaw, this is the most serious case I have ever had in my life as an exorcist. My dear son, you shall see the signs of God following this person.”

Anna always arrived early at the little church, and, when I went outside to meet her, she would perceive my arrival, so that, as I entered the door on the left, she would escape through the door on the right. She felt my presence. Indeed, it was strange. For example, we would put her on the little bed, and Father Gabriele would do an exorcism for half an hour, and if she did not revive, I had to continue. Then we would bring her to the sacristy, and within a quarter of an hour of prayers of liberation, she would come to her senses. Thus, little by little I began to see some signs that God was calling me to a precise action regarding her, but it was only my thought.

The medical doctors said that they could do nothing for Anna, that she needed a priest.

Inexplicably the girl went into possession very often and for many hours; once the possession lasted twenty-seven hours. During the exorcisms the family members took turns holding her still on the bed. They were very helpful; after I took over, they installed a speaker phone so that I could exorcise over the telephone. Thus, I personally experienced what Father Amorth had told me, that the fundamental mainstay of the exorcist is prayer made with faith and not the place or the way it is done. In fact, an exorcism done at a distance has the same efficacy as that done in the exorcist's presence.

Before I got involved in this case, the relatives, desperate about her state during the periods of possession, were forced to contact different exorcists, seeking help to make her return to normal, but those exorcists failed to alleviate her sufferings.

When I got involved in her case, my prayers proved useful. At times, a quarter of an hour was enough to bring her back her senses.

For this reason, the family decided to ask the bishop to give me an official mandate permitting me to pray over her. I did not believe it would happen. I knew Monsignor Mugione personally, and I believed the request impossible; but the family wrote a letter mentioning my name, and he immediately authorized me. And so, I still follow Anna. Her case was the first official mandate given to me from the Church.

I always saw this case as a special calling from God. Anna and I even succeeded in graduating together! Let me explain. Anna would enter into possession the day before she was to take her exams. So

it was up to me to be ready and available, day and night. After I received the mandate from her bishop, I followed her university studies, so that when she entered into possession before the exams, I would exorcise her; and at the end, we both graduated with a 4.0 average, and therefore magna cum laude!

In most of the years that she knew me, she saw only my shoes or my hair because when she tried to look me in the face, her eyes turned around and she was not able to see me. Later she improved, and she was able to look at me and embrace me. It was very intense.

She was also able to see Father Gabriele, but only after his death. She attended his wake and saw him in his coffin; before then, she was never able to look at his face.

Do you realize that, for thirteen years, I exercised the official mandate of the Church on this person who did not know me? Now, finally, weekly prayers and an exorcism once a month allow her to lead a normal enough life. Until certain realities are experienced, it is difficult to understand them!

This was one of the most difficult cases that Father Gabriele left me. He always said, "One day this case will be yours."

It is God who liberates, not the priest. We can give relief, but God does everything.

You have spoken of the enemy's greater aggressiveness in the presence of people who are not in the state of grace. People say that priests hear their sins described by the Devil, but I have never heard of greater sufferings for the afflicted.

Owing to the specific experience I am living with Anna, I am permitted, as provided in the ritual, to ask questions during the exorcism.

There are some exceptional cases in which the Lord or Our Lady asks for the willingness to accept the sacrifice of a prolonged possession. This, in my view, is Anna's case. It is a form of expiation. I am convinced that she is in all effects a victim soul. When I exorcise her, Satan and the other devils always tell me that they want to leave and, when I pursue it further, saying, "Who is it that does not let you go away?" they always answer me the same way:

“That one. . . . [She] does not want me to go away.” That one, naturally, is the Virgin Mary.

Why do you think Our Lady does not allow them to leave?

To gain multiple benefits. It might seem strange, but besides the sanctification of the suffering person and of the person's closest relatives, there is also in play the salvation of many other souls. In Anna's case, the expiation that occurs as the result of the exorcisms is aimed particularly at the purification and the sanctification of the clergy.

Naturally, God does not abandon these persons to desperation; rather He brings them closer to Him through an exceptionally particular love. More than once during normal moments, I felt myself saying that despite the pains and the difficulties that possession brings, the afflicted experience an extraordinary closeness to God, close enough to ask Him what will happen to them the day that He liberates them. With every extraordinary intervention of the Devil, there is a corresponding extraordinary intervention of God. The one who trusts in God's transcendence will not have difficulty understanding this.

What great suffering! Think how terrible it must be not to be able to have any type of relationship, hiding out of fear of being excluded and misunderstood, not to be able to go out of the house or have a stable job because of the occurrence of sudden and unexpected attacks and, even, as in the case of Anna, not to be able to enter a place where persons distant from God are present because of the risk of reinforcing the evil presence in herself.

Certainly, God assures liberation to those who persevere in prayer and in the struggle, but what suffering! The suffering that the possessed experience is unspeakable; they must bear physical impediments, atrocious pains, and humiliations of every type.

Then, the person with spiritual problems worsens if he finds himself in a negative environment.

A person who is in a state of possession is very sensitive and, finding himself in a hostile environment, may become upset and feel the need to escape. For example, participation in celebrations of liberations and healing, where persons with moral and spiritual

problems are among the participants, is not advisable for those who are certain they are possessed. Certainly, such Masses can perform a great diagnostic function, indicating the problem, but I believe that for the one who is certain of being possessed, it is more appropriate to turn to an exorcist for a private and reserved appointment.

I base this opinion on my experience. I am not saying that prayers of healing and liberation are harmful; the problem is that the cases of possession need a particular type of cure.

A prayer made carelessly, especially a prayer that gives the Devil orders, can worsen the situation for the demonopaths, as can wizards and witches who could be infiltrating these very crowded events to “unload negativity,” as they like to say, carrying out their mysterious rites. There are also the curious who, instead of praying, hang around just to look at the unfortunate persons disturbed by evil spells as if they were circus freaks.

In short, it is necessary to be prudent.

The Devil is astute, and he is always seeking a way to get away with something. And when he is in dire straits, he becomes audacious, like a fish that, having taken the bait and is being taken from the water, does everything to break the fishing line.

In the beginning, Anna said to me that when she returned from large prayer gatherings, she was worse than when she started out. Father Gabriele completely confirmed this, but he also said that each prayer offers relief, and therefore he advised the lesser cases to attend anyway. But I advise that the lesser cases not participate, just as I have always advised them not to go from chapel to chapel and chaplain to chaplain to obtain a prayer or some counsel.

To avoid confusion, it is better to have only one priest and one confessor. I understand that the people who have this problem want to be well immediately and will do anything, but unfortunately God's time is not our time, and everything cannot be obtained like magic.

What I have said should not discourage a person from continuing to sustain the exorcists with prayers or to participate in prayer groups that intercede for the liberation of disturbed people. It is not at all harmful for one to live a sacramental life; indeed, it is a great help!

Moreover, I remind both those who suffer in the spirit and their priest collaborators of the importance of the sacrament of

reconciliation. No exorcism can compare to a good confession!

As the Devil said to Saint Nicola di Flue (1417–1487), “The greatest defeat God has inflicted on us is the sacrament of penance: because a soul in the state of mortal sin belongs to us, but with a good confession he is snatched away.”

Liberation from the slavery of sin obtained through the merits of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ literally infuriates the Devil!

Whoever prays and lives in the grace of God cannot be attacked — perhaps weakened, but not attacked — except for some holy souls, but those are special permissions.

If we believe in God and we trust in Him, we have nothing to fear.

Anna was sent to the exorcist by the medical doctors. In your view, could collaboration between the medical and the spiritual have been established?

I would say yes, particularly with the psychiatrists. It is always best that a person be cared for in his totality.

Do you think that where there are spiritual problems, there is also a psychological problem?

Not always, but most of the time, yes. For two reasons: first, because spiritual suffering also influences the psyche, and then because the demon, who is doing everything to hide himself, often simulates some psychological pathologies. Based on my personal experience, I have observed that the Devil attacks the mind, in particular, to negatively influence memory, concentration, and the emotions.

Do demons have particular specializations?

I do not think that any of them lack anything!

In any case, it is possible to observe a certain organization among them. Being fallen angels, each one of them belongs to the hierarchical level that he possessed before the fall. Other than that, each demon has its own specific way of being, and this is well noted by the exorcists: there are loquacious demons and silent ones; there is the demon that stands out for his arrogance, his blasphemy, his hatred, and his lust and the one who causes physical evils, et cetera. The superior hierarchies are usually the most tenacious.

A demon of a superior hierarchy, in a mysterious way, can force a demon of an inferior hierarchy to abandon or remain in the body of a possessed person. There are very many of them, and above them all is their leader, Satan, who commands. During exorcisms, he is almost never present and only with great reluctance says his name during interrogations, opting for the generic “I,” perhaps to mimic the divine “I Am.”

He has a terrible fear of being defeated, and he does everything to hide himself. Usually he shows himself at the end, when the other devils that possess the person are weakened or when the Lord obligates him to show himself. Satan, unfortunately, is almost never alone.

How many demons are usually present?

The number is variable. It begins with one, but then you may encounter seven or even legions. Sacred Scripture confirms this: we find the sinner possessed by seven spirits (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2) and the demoniac of Gerasa who was possessed by a legion (Mark 5:9). Most of the time, in the case of a person who receives an evil spell, the number and type of demons depend on the demons that were invoked during the evil ritual. Certain rituals correspond to certain demons. Knowing what type of spell has been cast helps the exorcist to select a prayer that targets that spell.

I emphasize again the importance of the interview!

It is fundamental to determine whether the person I have before me has problems of a spiritual nature or disturbances of a psychological nature. A person disturbed spiritually may even eloquently manifest its signs during the interview: for example, he may enter into possession or give other signs of an evil disturbance.

When I am uncertain, I bless the person: a blessing is good for everyone. At the end of each exorcism, Father Gabriele and I always blessed each other.

But when you speak of blessings, what are you speaking of?

I am speaking of the prayers of liberation, which are truly very efficacious. But for most priests, the blessing is a sign of the cross done quickly.

But even one sign of the cross, done with faith and accepted with faith, is very efficacious! Many episodes of the saints come to mind. For example, our founder, Saint Paul of the Cross,¹¹ with only a sign of the cross, exorcised evils and chased devils and other demons. The problem is that so many priests do not believe in these sacramentals, or perhaps they are afraid to believe and to change their habits.

Why do so many exorcists say that possessions are very few?

Let's be clear: true satanic possessions are few, but cases of obsession, vexation, and, in general, all those phenomena in the category of "diabolical evils owed to evil presences" are extremely frequent.

Among the most recurring signs that verify, with a certain confidence, the existence of an authentic possession are: speaking with a rich vocabulary a language unknown to the patient, or perfectly understanding a person who is speaking another language unknown to the listener; the discovery of hidden or distant objects; and displaying strengths greater than one's age and condition. Rarer are the phenomena of levitation, the materialization of objects from the mouth, walking on walls, and in general all those categories of phenomena that are part of the preternatural.

The afflicted seldom pronounce the name of God or the Virgin Mary; usually they prefer to say "that one" because it is the demons who are speaking for them! Contrary to all the clichés, it is very difficult for the possessed to curse. And, after the blessing, if the case is authentic and serious, it takes much time for the person to come out of the state of possession and return to his senses.

Other than this type of affliction, there are those who have received an evil spell or a curse and, although they do not have any of the signs of possession, are violently attacked by mysterious fears, insomnia, annoying sounds in the house, voices, and nightmares. They are the vexed and the obsessed, and when they submit to exorcisms, they may suffer from sudden pains, cry out, and have impulses to vomit, but generally they do not expel anything other than saliva and foam. These are extremely strong disturbances.

At times, one hears about possible repercussions on the exorcists.

I believe that is a type of superstition. I do not believe that there can be repercussions on priests who have a mandate and who maintain a life of prayer.

It is possible, however, that certain things happen in order to develop the sanctity of the person. Let us always remember that the priest is only a human instrument, and, if he has complete awareness, the Lord gives him the grace to lift evil spells. It is always the work of God that fortifies the priestly ministry, that permits the priest no failures, and that allows his faith to increase; and, if the priest does not give in to any type of temptation, it is at that moment that the demon witnesses the action of God.

But at times, without being aware, one opens the door to evil.

I think of the example of Monsignor Milingo, who, in his old age, had a moment of weakness, a yielding to temptation that was complicated by the neglect and abandonment of the Church, which isolated him. Human isolation and solitude, together with a mind weakened by old age, overwhelmed him and contributed to his collapse. He was, in my opinion, one of the greatest exorcists in history, and he helped hundreds of people.

Someone has called Father Amorth a saint.

I believe that anyone who has known him well considers him a saint. The sanctity of which I speak is not the sanctity that is brought to the altars with the recognition of the Church, but that which each one can live on the earth in silent submission and total acceptance of all that the Lord asks of one.

The sanctity of Father Gabriele consisted in his tireless availability for the needs of his neighbor and in complete faith in what he was doing. He never doubted the presence of the Evil One, but what made him completely unique was his devotion to Our Lady. At times, it happened that a person he scheduled did not arrive for the appointment, and so we spent that time reciting the Holy Rosary. For him, this was a moment of joy. In his blessings, the presence of Our Lady was very strong. Also, in places where he received people

there was a statue of Mary. He was also very devoted to Padre Pio and to Father Candido, whom he called his life teacher.

I also knew Father Candido, and I remember going during my novitiate to the Scala Santa (the Holy Staircase at the Church of Saint John Lateran), where he was practicing the ministry of exorcism. I was young and light-years away from these things; I knew nothing about any of it. And now Father Candido is about to be proclaimed blessed!

It pleases me that Father Candido, a Passionist, was the teacher of Father Amorth, a Pauline; and that Father Gabriele trained me, a Passionist. I see continuity and honor in this.

Among others, I must confess that I find myself practicing this ministry without having wished it. It is very fatiguing and risky, because I must know how to discern where there is truly evil, and if I do not understand, I could do harm. I very much prefer to listen to people, to hear their confession, and to follow them spiritually. But if the Lord wishes otherwise, I say, "Here I am, Lord," and when a bishop asks me for help, I am there.

In your opinion, are exorcists useful?

Exorcists are more than useful: they are indispensable, especially today, when among the young people a new esoteric mentality has become widespread. To this, one can add that ever more families are renouncing their own educative role and abandoning young people to themselves, depriving them of qualified guides and solid points of reference. When one sets aside God to adore the self, traps spring up everywhere, and it becomes tragically certain that a door will be opened for the Prince of Evil.

The demon, as God's mimic, has his sacramentals: drugs, alcohol, illicit sex, alternative religious practices, magic, charms, et cetera. How many young people later repent the consequences of what they once believed were but fleeting moments of euphoria!

What are the practical preparations for becoming an exorcist?

Many! Theoretical knowledge helps up to a certain point, but it is practical experience that counts most: one learns the ministry by working with a good exorcist. I emphasize "good," because there are also exorcists who behave more like doctors than priests.

How many exorcists truly believe?

This I do not know. I believe. About the others, I can only affirm that each one comes to terms with his own individual conscience.

If you wished to recommend someone to be appointed, to whom would you send him?

I know only Father Amorth's work, but he is no longer able to receive anyone! Certainly, many good exorcists exist, but I do not know them very well. Since I began working with Father Amorth, I no longer looked for other exorcists. Only twice did I attend a meeting of the International Organization of Exorcists, but in these large assemblies, too much theology is discussed, and the real problems are avoided. Little space is given for sharing experiences. And to think that Father Gabriele founded this association solely for this purpose! We exorcists need to know how to work for the good of souls, not to discuss whether the Devil exists.

Do you have other particularly significant situations in your experience?

I follow a family — a father, mother, and two children: all are attacked by a terrible spell. The parents also experience possession; the two children, thanks be to God, do not. During an exorcism, the beast said to me, "If you do not leave me alone in this woman, I shall touch something that is most dear to you." I knew immediately that he was speaking of my mother. That same day, Momma fell from the stairs and broke her thigh bone, but I did not know it immediately. The next day, while I was exorcising the same woman, the Devil said to me, "Now are you content with what I did?"

I discovered it by calling home and asking for news. Momma was operated on after a week. Following the surgery, she had kidney failure, then cardiac arrest, and finally she died.

The only object that I took from Momma's house was a blouse, one that she wore when she was doing housework, a simple article but one that reminded me intensely of her.

One day when I was exorcising the woman, I remembered this blouse; and saying nothing, I left the room briefly. When I returned, I placed it above the woman: she vomited everything, and then I understood that there had, in effect, been an evil intervention in the

woman's illness and in the death of my mother. Today, with God's permission, I am certain that my mother intercedes for this family.

They are incredible stories, yet they happen. With Father Gabriele, I could speak freely even of things this strange. He was always attentive and helpful.

You spent much time alongside Father Gabriele, who was an internationally known luminary in this field. Have you thought of opening a school, of holding seminars, or of making yourself available for sharing this fund of knowledge and experience of which you are the trustee?

I already do this. Obviously not with seminars, but I respond to letters or phone calls that arrive even from abroad from priests who ask for information and suggestions for particularly serious cases.

Have you ever regretted having initiated a collaboration with Father Gabriele?

No. Now and then I have asked the Lord what He wished from me, why He had chosen me, but regrets, no. Never. If God wished this for me, to go against His will would be foolish.

It is a question of being faithful to the mandate God gives you: to be humble and to remain in your place.

As a priest, I know that when I bless a person, I am giving spiritual and physical relief that gradually clears away the cause that has provoked the evil, and this makes it better. The definitive exit of the demon, however, does not depend on me; it is the Lord who permits the exit when He wishes it and how He wishes it.

Unfortunately, there are persons who give up after a while, who can no longer do it. They abandon the prayers. Then the enemy takes up even more space. I understand that it isn't easy for the one who is spiritually ill.

Even for exorcists, it is not easy, because these moments of prayer drain them physically, causing great tiredness. That's why I don't know how Father Amorth was able to do it morning and afternoon, every week, every day, including feast days. I do not know how he did it. I envy him.

Why is this work so physically taxing?

We are dealing with spiritual entities that attack us in many ways without being seen. The vast majority of the afflicted develop a brute strength that compels us exorcists, together with our collaborators, to exert formidable physical efforts to defend ourselves. Kicks, punches, scratches, and butted heads are part of the order of the day.

Fortunately, Our Lady protects us under her mantle; otherwise, who knows what would happen to us?

I, personally, have always had a mandate only *ad personam*; that is, I am to follow a few people who have very serious problems. If I had a general mandate, I would have to follow everyone, and that would not be possible.

But even where I have a mandate, I practice very little: I prefer the prayers of liberation that I learned from Father Gabriele, which are extremely efficacious.

The ministry of healing and liberation requires a total renunciation of self, a total dedication toward your brothers and sisters, and the willingness to accept physical and spiritual suffering. Everything is done with joy, because it is God who wishes it; it is His will; and when one lives in the will of God, everything is joy, peace, and love. But the exhaustion stays with everyone!

In the end, do you feel called to be an exorcist or not?

If God wishes, I will not turn back, as I did not turn back when the Lord claimed me in my youth. A vocation is always an unfathomable mystery.

And are you content being a priest?

If I said I'm content, I would be saying very little. What can I desire more than a life completely offered to God and to people? Like every good vocation, the priesthood involves the difficulties of daily life, the pros and cons of life, but each testing ground is a gift given for us to grow.

If you compare this aspect of the priesthood with other tasks that you perform, which one benefits your spiritual life the most?

I carry out my priestly ministry by making myself available to hear confessions and celebrate the liturgy. I have worked in a hospital as an assistant chaplain, dedicating myself to assisting spiritually the sick and the medical and paramedical personnel. My exorcisms are limited to just a few cases.

All these experiences are equally edifying. I try to engage myself to the best of my ability. The rest I leave to God. Saint Joseph of Cupertino says: "In each of your affairs, temporal or spiritual, do your part and then let God do His part." I try to apply this daily.

Did you get along with Father Gabriele, notwithstanding his difficult character?

At times, he was a little hard, but it was the result of his age and the weight of the work. Many people assailed him for nothing, and then he would react badly. But he was like a father toward those who were truly ill.

At the beginning of our working relationship, we clashed a bit, because I was certain that, whenever it concerned a psychological case, it was necessary to say it in order not to deceive the person or aggravate the situation. If a person believes he has a spiritual problem and does not, he is ruined, because he does not experience a cure. This is a great danger for the exorcist. For this reason, Father Gabriele would always say that it is important to have the support of a psychotherapist when one is exorcising.

I prefer to lean on a psychiatrist, Catholic by tradition, but not one who quickly ascribes to all things a supernatural origin. The risk — also for doctors — is that of seeing the Devil everywhere. A well-balanced and very objective professionalism is needed, so that we can rightly interpret symptoms, which at times are very similar to one another. I have often asked doctors to intervene during the prayers, and then together we evaluate the situation.

I do not agree with those who attach labels to situations in order to standardize or establish fixed procedures; each person is unique. The prayers of liberation and exorcism are always helpful. God decides when to close the door.

We know that it is God who liberates; we priests can only give relief. But until God permits the liberation, the task of the exorcist is

to give relief that at times lasts a week, or a month, or a year, or ten years — at times, a lifetime. Therefore, there is no limit to the time or the number of the exorcisms, other than suspending the blessings. I must continue until I see that my prayer gives relief.

What could I say to Anna, whom I have followed for thirteen years, and who before me went to Father Amorth and before him to other exorcists and to medical doctors who said that they could do nothing to help her? Should I have abandoned her after a few months like the other priests who, having seen the gravity, preferred to let her go? When she is herself, she often says to me, “You are the only one who has been faithful, who has lasted so long.”

In your opinion, what did God want from Father Gabriele when he stopped him with illness?

I think that He wished him to take a respite, some privileged time off to dedicate himself to the prayer of intercessions, and thus continue his special mission.

When he was young, even if he were ill, he never held back, never canceled appointments. But the most challenging exorcisms require great physical strength, and toward the end he could not bear the weight. He continued to keep appointments, but besides his physical enfeeblement, he began to forget some parts of the ritual.

In fact, Father Amorth had always performed his ministry by reciting from memory the long Latin ritual. During the last few years, he often had to read parts of the formulas. This seems to me more than understandable, considering his age, nearly ninety, and the decades he gave to this exhausting work! To think that after only thirteen years of this ministry, and with a schedule decidedly lighter than his, I already feel it physically!

Were you and Father Gabriele close until the end?

Until the day he went to the hospital, he called me every day. We spoke by phone until it was no longer easy to reach him, because at times, I could not respond immediately, and, if I tried to return the call, I had to speak with the receptionist, who did not always allow me to speak to him. There were other complications: I was no longer in Rome, and we were not always free on the same days or at the same times, but spiritually we were always extremely close.

He had on his bedside table a photo of the two of us, and he would say to me: “I am looking at your photo; I remember you, and I never cease to pray for you!”

Unfortunately, for several reasons, I could not visit him in the hospital, so the last time I saw him was toward the end of 2015. He never complained of anything — above all, his health. He would say: “I’m old, I have done what the Lord wished, not what I wished. . . . Here I am.”

Do you have anything to add?

I would like to give thanks to the Lord for having permitted me to see His power and His mercy act in all those I have known in these years ministering with Father Gabriele. If it is true that where God is, Satan does not lose the opportunity to manifest himself and make trouble, it is also true that God has already triumphed; the victory is the Lord’s!

I hope that these words can be of help to the many, particularly young people, who are so exposed to the allurements of the Evil One. Dear young people, be strong, be Christian, love God, love the Church, have faith, and the demon will flee from you!

¹¹ Saint Paul of the Cross (1694–1775), founder of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ (the Passionists), of which Father Stanislaw is a member.

Rosa, His Assistant

During the summer of 2016, Father Gabriele was in the hospital, being treated for pneumonia, and his condition worsened during his convalescence. Food would go into his lungs instead of his stomach.

I think that, at the end, they should have performed a tracheotomy, if he would have had one, but the doctors at Gemelli Hospital preferred to avoid it.

He was accustomed to praying the Rosary at four o'clock each afternoon, and he wished to maintain this custom even while he was in the hospital, so I would always come to recite it with him, and the doctors would also come and then also his superior and the hospital chaplain.

Was he conscious until the end?

Up until a couple of days before, he was perfectly conscious, so that if someone came to visit him, he would bless them. He did not speak well because his throat was always very dry; however, he made himself understood.

He did not receive many visits in the hospital because the doctors did not permit them; otherwise, there would have been a continuous coming and going. Some people are still upset about by this.

How did he live these last moments in the hospital?

I recall that the doctor asked him, "Gabriele, what do you wish from me?" And he responded, "That you cure me." He wanted to go home. He was convinced that he would get better. He had all his plans; he wished to let people know that he had returned and would begin to receive them. He knew that there was so much need.

Then one day, he called me near the bed. He looked at me and he said, "Today you are not well." In fact, I felt ill, and I confirmed it to him. Then he got hold of Dr. Fausto and said to him, "I recommend Rosa to your care." Nothing escaped him; he was a person with a sensibility and a unique awareness even in his sickness.

I think that there will not be others like him and Father Candido; they are people of another epoch, people with a good upbringing and manners, a rarity.

In the hospital, he never complained, even though the nurses took nearly an hour to change him because of the many tubes the doctors had inserted into him.

The first time he was in the hospital, in 2012, he looked at us and said, “Did you know that I am the most pampered man in this place?” He was a humble person, but it pleased him to be the center of attention, and we also pampered him: we brought him all his meals from home, tasty things in order to fuss over him and buck him up. He always wanted gelato, chocolate and pistachio. Once during an exorcism, the Devil flung a remark in his face: “You are a glutton!” He responded, “Well! What’s it to you?”

One day in the hospital, an acquaintance came, and when she saw him in bed with an oxygen mask, she burst into tears. With a mischievous look in his eyes, he took the mask off and stuck out his tongue at her! So we had to laugh. He always had the capacity to lighten up situations, as if he were taking everything upon himself.

Each time we left him, he would say, “Thank you, thank you,” but we owed him the thank-you, for all that he always gave us. He loved human relationships, mutual and true friendships. Unfortunately, he had very few.

How did you come to know Father Gabriele?

I was Father Candido’s helper. I would enter the room when he received the person, and I prayed and helped to hold him up. Father Candido was a man of few words; he prayed in silence and placed the stole on the chest, propping it up with three fingers.

One day in 1986, I went with him by car to the Vatican and, while speaking with him, I told him I could no longer work because of my children: they were always ill.

He looked at me and said: “This will be your work: you will help Father Amorth.”

I asked him, “But what must I do?”

He did not respond.

I did not know Father Gabriele, so I went to him and said: “Father Candido sent me; he said that I must help you.”

He said to me: “Okay, I shall speak with him,” and he accepted me immediately.

The first time I went to help him, I was bewildered: I thought I was in a cage of crazy people. There was a lady who was ill: she ran away through the courtyard, and we had to run around looking for her and bring her back. She was the wife of a general, and she was very ill.

Father Gabriele and Father Candido used different methods regarding the ritual. Father Gabriele read the ritual aloud. Then he learned it from memory; he was practical.

Later, we made the first trip to Lourdes with Father Candido, Father Gabriele, and a group of afflicted persons. What an adventure! Once, I was alone in the church, and I had eight persons with me who were afflicted. All alone! When I no longer knew what to do, I sent a boy to advise Father Candido, who, instead of rushing over, sent the boy to tell me to remain calm. It was not a joke; I had to argue with the priests to make them give them the Eucharist.

I miss Lourdes so much. We went every year for ten years, and after the pilgrimage, those persons began to improve.

Lourdes was our only pilgrimage, even though Father Gabriele immediately believed in the apparitions at Medjugorje. He never explained why to me, but he was firmly convinced that they were authentic.

How did you know Father Candido?

The doctors sent me to him for my son Emanuel; they said that they did not know how to confront or understand his illness, and the assistant to the head physician told me to take him to an exorcist. That's how I came to know Father Candido: I brought him the child, and immediately Father placed his hand on his eyes and said to him, "Now you shall be well. You shall see." In fact, that is how it has been. He had been operated on twice; he had a drainage that pained him when it was cleaned; and he had blood in his urine.

One morning, I went to the Scala Santa Church, where many souls go for healing. I noticed in front of me a young man, and I asked myself what problems such a person could have, so tall and handsome, luminous, and well built. He helped me with my bag and asked me if Professor Pinelli had spoken to me of a certain illness, the name of which I cannot now recall.

I responded, "I am here precisely because the doctors said to me they do not know how to cure my son or how to find the origin of his illness."

He said, "Look, I am a doctor at the Bambino Gesù Hospital, and I shall personally follow your son's case. Do not worry."

I said: "We have an appointment on the twenty-first."

He repeated, "Don't worry. I shall look after him."

Meanwhile, he accompanied me, carrying my bag. When I arrived at the Piazza San Giovanni to get the car, I turned around, and he was no longer there. Then I asked an attendant if he had seen where the young man who was accompanying me had gone.

He looked at me kindly and asked if I felt well and advised me to go home.

I was a little frightened and asked myself what effect going to the Scala Santa was having on me. I stopped at the school and related this fact, and the teacher also told me to return home. Then I went to the hospital and searched for this doctor, who had given me his surname.

They asked me why I was looking for him, and I told them how I had met him. They told me that he had been dead for years and that the physical description did not coincide. Anyhow, from that day forward, my son had good health.

After this episode, I continued to go to Mass at the Scala Santa, and Father Candido told me which persons I was to follow for Father Gabriele.

What were the differences between the two?

Father Candido prayed softly in Latin, while Father Gabriele read the ritual out loud. I don't know which technique was more efficacious. At times, both priests followed persons for years without seeing them liberated. For example, Father Candido followed a woman for thirteen years; then she went to Tuscany. She met a priest who lived there, and she was liberated going to the parish church.

Father Candido had the gift of knowledge and of prayer, but persons were not liberated more quickly for this: the process was always the same, often long and sorrowful. He understood if it was an illness or a spell, but that did not accelerate the liberation.

For this reason, it seems to me that it is best not to know the origin of the illness. Indeed, it is better to receive a prayer and no more, because I have seen so many times that discernment brings hate, separation, and the desire for revenge. It is understandable for the one who is ill; so, precisely for this reason, I believe that it is better not to know.

From this point of view, the fact that Father Gabriele did not have gifts and did not remember was a grace. But at times, he would remember; it depended on persons and their situations.

What were Father Gabriele and Father Candido like when they were together?

I remember when Father Amorth grabbed a tuft of Father Amantini's hair. He twisted it and combed it; it was funny. And that one would laugh and let him do it. Saints are cheerful people.

They laughed together and told jokes. Father Gabriele knew so many, and so did Father Candido. They were good company.

They knew each other since the day the bishop gave Father Amorth the letter with the mandate, and they worked so much together.

Father Gabriele went to the Scala Santa on Sunday, and they would discuss the various cases and pray together over the people. The apprenticeship lasted from 1986 to the end of 1992, six years working side by side, until the year of the death of Father Candido. Father Gabriele had already begun to work alone, but he always had something to learn.

They had their own diverse methods. Certainly, Father Gabriele did not have the gifts of Father Candido; for this reason, he would always say he was "a piece of wood" or "a good-for-nothing" or "not worth a dried fig."

"I am not worth anything, the Lord does it all," he would repeat.

Who was holier, in your opinion, Father Candido or Father Gabriele?

I would say that they were on the same level, even though they were so different.

What did Father Gabriele tell you of his suffering?

At times, he would say, "I was wrong about marriage; I was wrong in the choice of a wife," referring to his troubles with confreres in the religious life.

Unfortunately, he was not well regarded by the Paulines, because there were too many people around him and there was too much confusion. Most likely, he was not understood. Therefore, there was no one who would help him apart from Brother Rossi. Probably it was ignorance; not everyone understood his caliber or how much he was doing for the Church. Perhaps they were not aware of the importance of his witness.

Once, when speaking with a nun at the infirmary, he called a certain public personage a Mason. Immediately, he suggested that I find an attorney, because he feared a lawsuit. Indeed, he had to retract it, and obtaining the attorney helped. How it helped! But Father Gabriele had said the truth. He was not concerned if he created "incidents" or if certain truths were inopportune. He did not lie, and he was not silent.

This was part of his character; he knew how to be tough, and he asserted his point of view without hesitation. Unfortunately, there are things that cannot be said.

Anyhow, he loved his congregation and his confreres, to the degree that in his will he asked to be buried at the cemetery with the other Paulines, even though we had insisted that he be put in the crypt where Blessed Alberione and Blessed Giaccardo are.

In what way did he suffer most in his ministry?

When he was failing to liberate the persons, he would say: "I am a good-for-nothing." Then he would add: "It is not I; it is the Lord who does it." And so he would calm down.

He also made it understood that he was not supported. For example, with Father Stanislaw he had a beautiful rapport, and he thought that Father would take his place, but they never succeeded in gaining permission.

Among all the persons you have seen ministered to by Father Candido and Father Gabriele, how many completely resolved their problems?

I do not know. Usually we would not see them anymore. They just stopped coming and did not even say thank you.

We know of a person from Tuscany who was cured: he had terrible bulimia. He could spend five hundred dollars a day on food, and if he did not have money, he would search the dumpsters for scraps. He could not help himself; he gulped down everything.

Father Candido sent me to his fiancée's house. Father explained that I would find a certain item in a display case that I must put in a little envelope and toss it into the Ombrone River. I failed to toss it away because of passersby.

Then, at a certain point I lost patience, and I threw it into the air. Precisely at that moment, a woman passed me in her car and covered me with insults! Such was the stress that I responded rudely; and, when I related the incident to the priest, he responded, laughing, "Well . . . whatever it takes, it takes!"

There was a mother who came on the pilgrimage to Lourdes. She belonged to a sect, and her arms were covered with cuts. The journey was terrible; we had to care for her all night because she was very ill. Just as we arrived at the grotto, she vomited little balls with red string inside them, and from that moment she began to eat again.

Then you no longer hear from these persons?

No, after the liberation, they disappear. Only once, in all the years, a person came to the Church of the Immaculate Conception to say thank you. Probably they were ashamed of their past and did not wish to be seen by those who had witnessed it. I am certain that Father Gabriele would have been pleased to see them again and to hear about their lives, but it was very rare.

It is difficult to understand such things, but we will understand in the next world.

Do you think Father Gabriele suffered from this?

Yes, he wished so much to see again the persons who were cured and to have a rapport with them. On the one hand, he felt connected to them through their shared experience; and then there would also be the satisfaction of seeing the results of so much effort. The fact that he did not have any contact with these people after their

liberation did not permit him to understand what was done that helped to liberate them. At times, just one good word, feeling oneself listened to, or reasoning together helps the liberation.

Then there was his human side; he was very caring, so he tended to lighten up situations. "Who's next?" he would say when he finished with a client, or "Come on, you rascal." He loved to draw comic moustaches on faces. "Puff, puff, puff," he would say. After the benediction, there was always a little kiss, when taking their leave. Also, in the hospital, when we were leaving, he always wished for a good-bye kiss.

He was a person who knew how to maintain a healthy balance between physicality and affection. He was not one who kept his distance; he knew how to have a reassuring physical contact, but he was not excessive. He was delicate and attentive to those who came to him. He remembered everything. Even when he was ill, he always remembered; and he was interested in everything. It is precisely to express his closeness to the afflicted that he became an honorary member of the Family of Light (www.familiadellaluce.it), an association that spiritually accompanied persons in serious difficulty.

But then, on the day of his funeral, I saw the gratitude of so many people there; their presence was moving.

Do you recall any special episodes?

Once, we were filming a program with TV personality Pippo Baudo at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, and we could not go on because Father Gabriele made us laugh so much. There was a lady seated in an armchair, and he was pretending to bless her. Instead of praying, however, he would say: "I'm hungry, I want some pasta," and we fell down laughing. The director would then send us away, and Father would begin again: "I want the pasta." They failed to finish the filming.

Pippo had a tremendous fear of Father Gabriele and tried to keep his distance. He could not even ask him questions, he was so frightened. Obviously, Father Gabriele got a kick out of Pippo's reactions to him; but the time passed from nine in the morning until two in the afternoon without finishing the work.

Father liked to eat well. About every three weeks, usually on a Monday, we would go to Umbria to a cloistered convent because there was a nun there who needed help. Once, we were at a restaurant nearby, and he said to the manager: "The next time I'm not coming on Monday, because you give me the leftovers from Sunday!" When we returned from Umbria, he and my husband would sing all the mountain songs. Once, they had eaten and drunk a bit much, so my husband stopped and asked me to drive; and then he proceeded to find fault with my driving.

So I stopped the car and said to him: "You drive if you can do better than me." Then Father Gabriele said to me: "Rosa, don't permit him to drive. He should not have scolded you, and you should not let him take the wheel again, for I haven't gotten out of the car yet!"

One day in Umbria, there were twelve of us at a table, and the superior who was with us said to him, "You say grace." So he did, and then he added a line: "Lord, we thank You for the food that You have given us, and the next time add a little more!" He was joking because we had sent back various courses, there was so much. But he was always joking.

He was simpatico; he always told jokes; he was tireless.

When he still had his strength, he would leave Rome and go where there was need, and I accompanied him. We often went to Latina, where there were parishes that called on him. At one parish, more than two thousand people greeted him. He was happy and said, "I feel like a king; they even brought me a coach!" It was necessary to call the police to protect him because he could not pass through the crowd and leave.

He also liked to travel at great speeds, and he would say to the driver, "Faster, faster! I absolve you!"

More than once while he was exorcising, the demon threatened me with revenge: "That witch who is always praying torments me, her and that friar, both of them." Then the demon said, "That one is getting on my tits."

Father Gabriele responded, "I'm glad she is getting on your tits." He had meant to say he was glad that I was bothering the demon by

praying. How we laughed! He repeated the bad words, and we could not help but laugh!

Did he always work in the same place?

He had to change places twenty-three times for the exorcisms; he could not find a stable location. The curia gave him a mandate, but he had to find a place in which to work. There was even one place where we stayed only one day: we arrived on a Friday, bringing all the necessary material, and on Saturday they sent us away. Too much noise; the pastor was afraid.

He was humiliated by all these changes. He would have preferred to remain at their motherhouse on Via Alessandro Severo, but only persons who did not make much noise were permitted. There were always people coming and going, and a certain reserve was necessary.

How regularly did he see an afflicted person?

It depended on the situation: the most serious, every fifteen days; the others, monthly. He never gave them appointments too close together, because he always said that if they received blessings too frequently, they were less engaged spiritually and prayerfully and tended to lean on the blessings too much. He would always say to them: "You are the one who liberates."

He gave them homework: pray the Rosary, participate at Mass, and receive the Eucharist. Then confession, which was worth more than an exorcism. But he never became angry with anyone who did not respect his instructions, because he would forget easily from one time to the next. He always asked me the names of the persons and, when it served, their telephone number; and he would say to me, "You are my computer." But he managed all the appointments himself.

Did you ever clash with each other?

We never argued. He would ask me if he had been discourteous or if he had responded badly; now and then, he would lose patience a little with us, but nothing serious.

But he could also be terrible. It once happened that the director who made *The Exorcist* was there to film a girl who had given her

consent but then changed her mind and no longer wished it. Father Gabriele was very angry at her because the film crew had come from the United States, but nothing could be done.

When he was angry, he was not at all sweet, even with me. At times, he became annoyed over stupid things, or when I allowed someone in without his permission or who did not have an appointment or if it was after hours. When he became aware of the situation, he would immediately protest with a severe tone, but then I would ask him to bless the person, and he would always consent.

Thirty years together, yet you continued to address each other with formal language.

Always. I always addressed him with the formal “you” because I was taught to do so, and I did not like excessive familiarity: it seems to speak of a lack of respect. He also always responded with the formal form. He used the familiar form with young people.

Father Candido entrusted you to Father Gabriele, and you had been very close to him. Was Father Gabriele close to you? Did he have time for you?

Always; he was very present, solicitous. It was a rapport based on respect and also on friendship.

There was a great understanding between us. During the prayers, he would look at me and indicate if he thought the person needed a prayer or not. At times, words were not necessary.

When he wished it, he could be very sweet. Once, a lady arrived suddenly without an appointment, and we were in the midst of an enormous stack of papers. He looked at her and said: “Come, come, I shall bless you now. Then you must disappear and go elsewhere to get yourself blessed!”

With the passing of the years, did his character soften a little?

Never! It was always very rigid: German in name and in deeds. He was extremely punctual. He would come to pick me up at home, and if he found the traffic light red, he would say to me: “Rosa, I am late one minute, but it was not my fault. We had to wait for the traffic light.”

Once, we were on a beltway, and there was a girl standing on the curb. He wanted to stop to help her. I didn't know how to explain to him that she didn't need any help; that she was there to prostitute herself. He was unaware of these things. We went on, but he was not tranquil; he had not understood. For him, there was a need to help.

And yet he was already advanced in age, and he confessed regularly. He was very simple. He was not malicious, and he was not accustomed to looking for evil. In his ministry of evil, he saw much of it; yet he always managed to maintain a clean heart. He was always taken by surprise.

In your experience, how effective are exorcisms with evil spells, and how much does affection and nurturing help?

Personal rapport is extremely important because the demon tries to isolate and depress the afflicted person so that he can destroy him; therefore, to feel esteemed, loved, and listened to helps very much.

Have you ever suspected that someone had problems that were primarily psychological? How does this discernment come about?

Yes, often we see it immediately. The most evident signs are during the prayers. If it is spiritual rather than psychological, one understands immediately; there are little signals.

There is the person who has psychological issues and pretends to be demonic, because it is easier to seek someone who prays than to get hold of the problem, but one understands when people are faking. With experience, things become clear and evident.

Father Gabriele did not have Father Candido's gifts, and he would say that he did not understand anything; when persons were faking, however, he detected it immediately. He continued the prayers, but then he did not give them additional appointments. One time, he received a person and, at the end of the prayers, said to him that the problems were not spiritual. He suggested to him jokingly, "See if you can find a good veterinarian to help you." The person responded: "I am a veterinarian!"

Yet the enemy does not always manifest himself at the first encounter. It differs from case to case. Once, when we were alone,

Father and I, a gentleman arrived. As soon as Father touched him with the stole, the man was lifted off the floor. We had to pull him down, grabbing him by his feet; and then we had to stop the prayers because there was no one to help. To manage that man, eight people attended him.

Another type always tries to hide, so Father Gabriele would recommend that the person call if any changes occurred in his situation.

He said that he heard with his hands not with his ears: situations were clear only when he prayed and placed his hands on the person. Then he would say things that he later did not remember saying. Evidently it was the Holy Spirit who illuminated him.

Were you ever afraid during the exorcisms?

No, I was never afraid. Praying brings great strength during and after the prayer, and then to be with Father Gabriele was a true privilege.

I miss him. I miss him so much, even though I know that he is near me.

Fausto, His Medical Doctor

It was providence. I was raised with two Orioni¹² who knew and esteemed Father Candido and did their best to have me meet him. In 1980, we got to know each other better and to cooperate greatly in these strange matters; and in 1990, when Father Candido was approaching his end, he wished me to be near Father Amorth to pass on to him all the knowledge I had acquired through the years.

During his last six months, Father Candido would point his finger toward us and say, "I implore you both, you must remain united until the very end." The same thing happened with Rosa. Father Gabriele told me clearly; he pointed his finger, and he said to me, "I urge you, she is not well. Do your best to cure her."

Having been part of the groups at the Scala Santa, I knew Father Gabriele by his fame before knowing him personally; everyone knew him.

He was famous for his culture, his precision, and his great sensitivity. Over time, he taught me a basic concept: "We do not ever judge. We try to understand, but probably we do not understand anything." This approach must not be confused with laxity or a lack of regard for situations. It was precisely his profound love for Christ and Mary, and the recognition of his limits. He educated everyone, always: his students in the seminary, the faithful, and all the friends who associated with him.

When Father Candido Amantini and Father Terzi asked Cardinal Poletti for greater assistance in the ministry of exorcism, the cardinal called Father Amorth, who at that time was the director of the magazine *Madre di Deo*. Cardinal Poletti, unlike many other ministers of the Church, was always appreciative of the ministry of exorcism. He gave Father Amorth the appointment and sent him immediately to learn from Father Candido, in June of 1986.

You were present at the first encounter between Father Gabriele and Father Amorth.

Yes! I recall that at the Scala Santa, there appeared this tall, austere, imposing figure, around sixty years old, wearing a black hat and a long black coat over his cassock and carrying a black briefcase

under his arm. He immediately showed great veneration for Father Candido, trying to kneel; but Father Candido anticipated it and blocked him.

During this first encounter, between the statues of Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady of Loreto, they began their first exchange. Their collaboration lasted until the end of 1992, when the Passionist became gravely ill and began to send Father Gabriele all the people he had been following.

In that first phase of his exorcistate, so exquisitely technical and practical and of which no one ever spoke, Father Gabriele, as a learned writer and jurist, understood that he had to hand down this experience to priests and to people of goodwill, so he decided to write books on this topic.

So we must thank Father Amorth for popularizing this practice that no one had ever written about before. So great was his capacity to write simply of such difficult things that he was accused of simplemindedness by the erudite, for whom it is impossible to believe “certain things.” His writings are interesting because they are understandable and do not excessively consider demonology itself, as was done, for example, by Father Corrado Balducci.¹³

But Father Candido always said: “Don’t open that door, because the Gospel speaks little of it. Let us remain firm with Christ and Mary, who are the only ones who keep us from troubles.”

In certain aspects, we who have assisted at exorcisms are privileged because the Lord has shown us things that are hidden to most. For us who have seen, it is easier to believe; it displeases me, however, that so many consecrated religious and priests do not believe in these manifestations.

Monsignor Giovanni Battista Proja wrote in those times (and Father Gabriele cited it often): “The moment will arrive when each of us will have to take responsibility, with rosary and crucifix, for exorcising someone who is attacked by the demon.”¹⁴ Certain parts of his books, clear and detailed, have stirred the consciences of many people and smoothed the path to a greater understanding of this topic.

What do you remember of the conversations between Father Candido and Father Amorth?

They were enjoyable. Father Candido would say: “You see, Father Amorth, look at the photographs — in particular, the eyes.” On the basis of what he could see, Father Candido would say, “This one has need, because there is a possession; here there is an obsession; but here, there is nothing.”

And Father Gabriele would respond, “Listen, Father: to be truthful, I don’t see anything; I see only that that one is a beautiful girl!” He always showed his great humility and would say, “Father, explain it to me; make me understand.”

Certainly, with time, the Holy Spirit refined Father Amorth, and he grew more sensitive to the elements of pictures and situations; indeed, he developed a keen sensitivity.

But Father Candido’s qualities of sanctity were unique. In fact, he had the gift of clairvoyance: with just a glance, he came to know the present, the past, and the future of the person. It was not necessary that the person be present. He also could understand things simply through an expression in a photograph.

He said nothing directly, unless it was strictly necessary; and he knew when it was the moment to speak. He could also understand if, how, and why there were evil spells; he recognized the times, the ways, and the perpetrators. He gave specific directions to find cursed objects.

Obviously, it was sanctity that granted him such a clear vision of situations, and that same sanctity gave him the capacity for great intercession; thus, he was able to resolve problems more easily. The charismatic has the gift of accelerating healing.

Unlike Father Candido, Father Gabriele lacked charisms, but before the will of God, every type of magic dissipates.

In His mercy, God provides us with holy priests who pray and intercede for liberation. Father Candido and Father Gabriele always proclaimed and lived a fundamental truth: “I can pray as much as I wish, but if the person does not want his own liberation, there is nothing I can do.”

Then it becomes a discourse of faith: if the afflicted person believes in God, his faith is liberating, because God can do everything. Therefore, we must take serious note of what God is; otherwise we

are putting limits on His action. Obviously, this discourse is truly complex.

We could also add that many of the limits on God's liberating work are put there by the consecrated priests and religious who do not believe in the extraordinary action of the Devil. Few priests are truly inspired on this topic.

Unfortunately, the great teachers are dead. Many priests believe that exorcism is simply the application of formulas in a manual, but this is not enough; it is restrictive. Exorcism manifests great faith in the Triune God, whom it illuminates in its action against evil.

Also, exorcism is not easy, because the exorcist may think he is doing good, when he is actually doing evil. This is an experience we have all had, even in little things. In a field as hidden as exorcism, the "underground crypt of today's Christianity," it is also true. Therefore, to be a valid exorcist, as were Father Gabriele and Father Candido, requires truly great dedication.

They were completely different, but many things united them deeply: neither of the two — one a monk, the other a priest — were careerists; they both kept their distance from the upper levels of power; and they both refused the best assignments.

They were persons of great charity, generous benefactors, profoundly understanding, and extremely reachable. To prepare for their prayer encounters, both endured nights of personal sacrifice, prayers, and abstinences.

Each was a refined and extremely cultivated Mariologist, and each one's services were of the greatest depth.

They were truly saints!

Their characters and modalities were different, but their objective was always and solely to render honor to God and to Mary. Being two dissimilar souls, they respected each other's differences in character; one never interfered with the other. Their encounters were always a Marian and demonological exchange. To be with them was never boring; from them, I learned unique things, and there was never enough time to do all that had to be done.

They always addressed each other in formal language. Father Gabriele always used expressive tones, while Father Candido at most revealed a slight smile. In him, a big laugh was a rarity. He was

a man who always lived in great depths. For example, I remember that he never engaged in empty chatter; he always spoke of God. He was an exegete of great inspiration.

As regards discernment, both Father Candido and Father Gabriele were in agreement: if there was only one symptom, it could come from various causes; but when there were at least three symptoms, it was appropriate to verify them with an exploratory exorcism. Also, if there was a headache that was recurring and potent; or, if added to that, there were difficulties at work or with relationships; or, if in the family, there was a serious situation, this would also be justification for an exploratory exorcism. Understanding the typology of the infiltration was another discourse. Also, regarding psychiatric health, at times, we found extremely painful things.

Let us think, for example, of pedophilia. Statistics show that it begins in the home between the ages of zero and seven years. Damage from pedophilia destroys a person nearly forever; and it is difficult for a pedophile to live a normal life. It often happens that the one who is abused repeats the action on others. Scientific research claims that it is the result of repetition; exorcistical experience tells us that most often behind it there are genealogical questions that can go back even to the eighth generation, at times even the ninth.

What pleased you most about Father Gabriele?

His precision. He was precise in everything — in his intellect, his heart, and his deeds. He was a man of great charity and mercy. He was always available to help, to be the server and not the served. He never pointed his finger at anyone or anything, even when he was very severe. His severity did not lead to judging: the Judge was “Another.” And then he was always aware that he could have been mistaken without even knowing it, and this always led him to be very prudent.

He was very pleasant, even in dramatic things. It was part of his nature, his character. He stunned me during his last week while I was trying to explain a biochemical phenomenon to him and he began to give me an accurate report of what I was trying to say.

I asked him: “Where did you learn these things?”

“I read them,” he said to me with a crafty expression. He could truly be disturbing. He wished to be perfectly informed of each thing that was happening to him.

One day during his recovery, I was speaking a bit in circles in order not to tell him something that I feared could upset him. He caught on immediately and said, “Now enough! Tell me straight the things I need to know.” In this I recognized the great observer, but also the sick man preoccupied with his present experiences. It was a great example of humanity and simplicity.

What did not please you about Father Gabriele?

He, like everyone, had to learn to adjust to living with certain situations without being able to act according to his feelings. Like so many, he had to keep silent, obey, and suffer unjustly. This was difficult for him.

What defects did you see in him?

To be frank, I cannot recall any. At a certain point, someone called me “rigid,” and Father Gabriele, together with Father Candido, took up my defense, saying, “Look, we have gotten to know him.” Certainly, he was severe, but a man of sterling character in his strengths and his weaknesses. I always found him understanding, good, generous, and altruistic. I saw him sincerely take on the problems of others; he was never superficial.

And yet — and it displeases me to say so — many times I saw him treated badly, not considered, left to himself. Although he was a bit isolated in his congregation, he was also very esteemed, even if he was often considered rigid and too precise. He had a brief tenure as the vice director general of his order: that lasted a year and a half. He was not reelected, because he was considered too severe.

During that period he told me repeatedly: “This has been the worst experience of my life. I have never spent a period more awful than this; I shall never do it again!” Thinking it over, he said, “Regarding human nature, there is a great problem: when things go badly, egoism takes over.” For this reason, he always reminded each one of us to be very attentive to our egoism and to avoid letting it prevail.

But was he truly so alone?

Never alone. He was always with God and Mary, with the angels and with all the saints.

The Paulines were his life; he never doubted that it was his congregation. Certainly, he had his trials and little crises. That's when I would hear him say, "Sometimes I think a person can err in marrying, and sometimes I think I chose the wrong wife."

On the other hand, we cannot forget that he knew personally the founder of his order, Father Alberione, and immediately after their first meeting, he became a Pauline priest. Father Gabriele never expressed doubts about the founder or Blessed Giuseppe Timoteo Giaccardo (1896–1948), never.

But he did have perplexities about certain actions of his community and its management. I believe that this is normal, and it did not diminish his love or loyalty for his confreres. I witnessed this when, at the end, I asked him to list for me the persons I should permit to visit him. He always responded, "My confreres." There were many Paulines who visited him in the hospital; he was always a point of reference for many of them, both the elderly and the young.

Was he afraid to die?

Absolutely not.

He thought about death.

He preferred to live. He wished to live.

But he was completely resigned to the will of God.

Also, accompanying him in that last year was an example of what true faith in God is: John Paul II, who, at the end of his life, lived in excruciating pain. For him, too, it was a true Calvary.

For me, being scientifically oriented, it is difficult to understand this as the divine will. It inspires me to pray more intensely that the Lord will grant me an easier end than his.

I was also able to observe how this man who suffered and wished to live was aware that he was approaching his end and was not afraid to show his sufferings. I saw that this suffering man had a "celestial" phase, when he was no longer preoccupied, but trusted completely in God. In those moments, he cheered me and encouraged me to accept God's will: "Thy will be done."

He understood what would happen in the next few hours: his departure. He said to me, “Be calm, be tranquil. Go rest because you are too tired. Tomorrow, it will not be like this.” He said this to me serenely with one of his mischievous looks, full of faith.

I asked him, “Why are you saying this to me?”

And with a raised eyebrow and a smile, he pointed with the index finger of his right hand to Heaven and said to me that he would soon be going. He lived another twenty-four hours.

Faith, which for him was above everything else, was enveloping him, both in his physical suffering and in his blessedness, and bringing him home. This is the great legacy that he left me; his face — impressed on my heart and on my mind — is a preparation for my own departure, and for others who live in the hope of Christ.

¹² Orioni: members of the Sons of Divine Providence, a religious order founded by Saint Luigi Orione.

¹³ Corrado Balducci (1923–2008) was theologian of the Vatican Curia and an exorcist of Rome who wrote several books, including some on diabolic possession.

¹⁴ Monsignor Giovanni Battista Proja (b. 1917) is a prolific author of books, including *Uomini, diavoli, esorcismi: la verità sul mondo dell'occulto*.

Father Stefano, Pauline Priest

How did you come to know Father Amorth, and what was your first impression of him?

I am a Pauline priest and therefore his confrere. I studied theology in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University between 2002 and 2005.

I saw Father Gabriele in person for the first time at the beginning of October 2002, immediately after completing my novitiate. At that time, there was one large dining room that hosted all our communities in the district of Rome. It was near the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls. I felt a certain emotion on that occasion, the same emotion one feels when one sees a famous personality.

I saw him every day at meals.

He always wore a cassock.

He had a decisive bearing, although he was a bit bent from age. He always arrived at the last minute, and he ate in a hurry; then he ran off immediately. He never put on airs. He was shy and did not treat people with familiarity, but at the same time he was always fraternal with everyone. It was interesting to see him in a large communal setting, because he behaved the same with everyone: he got in line for his meals like everyone else.

His daily routine impressed me. Then, after knowing him better, I understood that he lived the simple life of a religious, exactly like the rest of us, without privileges of any kind. He was, however, often absent from home. Even in those years, he went out to preach and to practice exorcisms at some church in Rome.

Did you already know of his fame?

Yes, certainly. I had often seen him on television and listened to his lessons on the program that he hosted for years on Radio Maria. Then I read his first two books: *An Exorcist Tells His Story* and *More Stories*.

Then you met him.

Yes, but I did not ask for an appointment immediately. I had a certain reverence for him. His work inspired fear in almost everyone.

I had some interest in demonology, but mine was not morbid. Then one day, I got up my courage and called him to make an appointment to have him hear my confession. The first time, I was a little afraid. I did not know what he might say to me. The confessions became more regular, and I must say that it was a great joy to be able to speak briefly to a person of that stature. He received me immediately without any haughtiness or arrogance.

Where did he receive you?

In his room. In those days, Father Gabriele lived in a wing of the house that we called the “100 cells.” They were very small rooms, shabby, and with bathroom tiles fallen from the walls. I believe, however, that he suffered when, during the renovation, he was transferred to a much more comfortable room in the infirmary, situated in an adjacent building. There was a lot of storytelling regarding that old room. At times during the night, one could hear the signs of demonic vexation, screams, and blows. He always denied it; and I believe that, in effect, they were just legends created to impress new arrivals.

What did he say to you when he met you personally?

I went to him about once a month for confession, and I obtained the typical useful advice that one gives a person who has set out on the path of priestly formation: we considered topics related to the spiritual life, perseverance, and the Pauline charism given to us by our founder, Blessed Giacomo Alberione, whom he loved very much.

After Father finished his appointments, he was always available, always ready to spend time with me when I visited him. In those ten minutes, he gave me all his attention. If he were interrupted by a phone call, he dismissed the person quickly to return immediately to me. They were brief but intense moments.

Perhaps to encourage me, he also told me something of his life and of the circumstances in which he entered the Society of Saint Paul, and in particular of his encounter with Alberione. He often repeated how he met him for the first time in 1942, during World War II, and that it was this encounter that changed his life.

During my theological formation, I interviewed him, together with a young confrere, for a little website we managed as theology

students. The theme of the discussion was the relationship that Father Alberione had had with Chiara Lubich, the founder of the Focolare Movement.¹⁵ On that occasion, he did not touch on the topic of exorcisms.

Although Father Gabriele was not my spiritual director, I began gradually to see him as an influential person in my spiritual formation. In a word: I regarded him as a father; therefore, I felt very tied to him and grateful to God for my having met him.

Then for you, he was an important figure.

Yes, decisively. For me, Father Gabriele was an example of the Pauline vocation: he united, in the healthiest way, our spirituality and our sanctity of life with the apostolate of social communications, which he practiced by spreading the principles of demonology and Mariology, about which he was a real expert. His television appearances and radio transmissions were not simple walk-ons; they were examples of true preaching from the “new pulpits,” the pulpits of the media — exactly as Father Alberione had envisioned. Here, with the example of his testimony, Father confirmed in deeds what he said with words.

Can you describe Father Gabriele’s personal spirituality?

He was a man of an extremely demanding spirituality, above all with himself. He placed his relationship with the Lord Jesus at the center of his day and had fixed moments in his day when the world fell away, and it was not possible to disturb him. Among these was his daily appointment with the Holy Rosary at 4:00 p.m., which he recited with our elderly confreres in the infirmary.

He took seriously discussions on the fundamentals of the interior life. Also, when he heard my confession, he immediately understood the problem. The only thing he feared, or better, “abhorred,” was sin. He often repeated, “Ordinary sin is the true cause of man’s ruin, not the extraordinary manifestations of the Devil.”

Have you participated in exorcisms?

Yes. One day during my third year of theology studies, I got up the courage to ask Father Gabriele if I could assist at some exorcisms, joining the prayer group that constantly followed him. At first, he was

hesitant, because he preferred people who were already trained to assist him. Then, considering my age (I was already forty), our reciprocal acquaintance, my genuine interest, and my desire to integrate my theological formation with expert pastoral experience, he gave me permission. At that time, our seminary training, generally in our Roman parish of Our Lady of the Apostles, embraced the more common pastoral activities. Thus, I thought that among these various experiences, exorcism could be useful for my spiritual journey and for my priestly future.

What do you recall of the exorcisms?

Except for times when I had a class, I participated in exorcisms one morning a week for about three months. Each session began at 9:00 and continued until 12:30. Father Amorth received five persons each morning. The first four did not have violent manifestations during the exorcisms: the fifth was scheduled last because, during the ritual, he would normally fly into a rage and had to be contained with the help of the persons in the prayer group.

It surprised me a little once when, after an exorcism, he told us incidentally that the gravity of the possession did not depend on its exterior manifestations, but rather on the rootedness of the demon in the person, and also on other specific factors, such as the power of the spell that was doing damage to the person, the length of time the demon had been in his body, and the quality of the person's life of faith, whether it was strong or weak.

In any case, the first time I was concerned and a little upset because, although the specialized readings prevented it from happening, I feared that some spiritual evil could attach itself to me. Perhaps it was the influence of the film *The Exorcist*. Besides, I felt a little embarrassed because I did not really know what to do or how to act. Then, little by little, I gained confidence, helped by the prayers that I was reciting with the other members of the prayer group.

It turned out to be a great experience, one that helped me later to confront serenely other situations that I encountered.

Did Father Gabriele help you when he saw you so upset?

Not particularly. That first time, he invited me to sit down and imitate the others in the group; then he concentrated on what he had to do

and no longer had time for me. Once, however, I went to speak to him myself and asked him for some clarifications. He explained some things to me that I had already read in his books. He spoke with a calm, nearly paternal tone, as if he were dealing with normal, ordinary things. In this way, he reassured me very much. He was truly an extraordinary man, prudent and filled with good sense.

What memories do you have of the persons who were subjected to exorcisms?

I was always impressed that the persons who came for the exorcisms were normal up to the moment they entered the room where Father Gabriele practiced the ritual. Then, when he began, they were transformed. They began to cry out, grew agitated, and, at times, even their features changed. I then understood the great necessity in the Church for more exorcists, for priests who would be engaged full-time in this very particular ministry.

Afflicted persons live an enormous drama that leads them to a life of solitude. They experience something terrible, which they cannot speak of with anyone, often not even with priests, who generally know something about the matter. In fact, they must live nearly a double life, with an invisible evil they must keep well hidden, and which is often provoked by persons close to them, such as family members and friends. They suffer so much, living with these manifestations, that they often must seek help from a psychologist.

I was always very struck by their sufferings and how Father treated them. He always welcomed them with a smile, a witty remark, and comments that helped make them comfortable, lessening their embarrassment. Then he began the prayers, and he went like a train: he was never distracted and did not stop until the end. He was completely concentrated on the prayers, which he recited in Latin.

Do you recall particular cases?

I remember the case of a young man, a big fellow, who came from the countryside near Rome and who clearly was subjected to spells. He had been going to Father Amorth for some time. He would enter roaring like a lion. He was dreadful. It required an indescribable effort to hold him down and immobilize him so that the exorcism could begin. His sister and his pastor accompanied him. During the

prayers he would cry out, referring to members of his family: “I shall kill them! I shall kill them!” He had a furious, spiteful hatred toward them. In the end, we discovered that the sister who accompanied him was also possessed. It evidently was a case that involved the entire core of the family. This made me reflect on the unhappiness that they were living in that house.

I also recall an extremely thin young girl around fifteen or sixteen years old. She was living with her mother. When the priest began the blessing, she began to curse in a very impressive manner. The mother then related that the paternal grandmother had a “little altar” on which she performed diabolical rituals. To me, it seemed to be a clear case of possession. In the end, Father Gabriele labeled the case psychiatric and turned it over to others. I did not understand why: perhaps she had manifestations that were different, or perhaps he preferred that she first get a medical evaluation.

Did Father Amorth always have a full schedule?

Yes. It was not easy to schedule an appointment with him. The chronic lack of exorcists weighed heavily on his work. Afflicted persons came from everywhere. Father Gabriele always preferred that they be subjected to discernment before seeing him, and for this reason he gave preference to those who attended meetings of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

Usually he remembered the persons that he received regularly. He forgot only things of minor or superficial importance, but his memory was a storehouse of the cases that were in front of him. Another endearing quality was that he usually wrote the dates of his appointments on little notes, such as Post-its, and on them he would draw a caricature of himself, his profile, usually a bald head with three strands of hair sticking up. Initially he drew each one personally, but finally someone had them printed. It was his way of living his relationship with these brothers and these sisters, a simple and fraternal gesture that helped lighten their sufferings. I was also always impressed by his affection, like a true pastor, for all the persons he met in his ministry. He was truly a father to everyone.

What was said of him in the congregation?

To live with a person so exposed in the media is not simple. The coming and going of journalists, of persons seeking an exorcist, the avalanche of phone calls, the screams that were heard in the corridors . . . Perhaps there was some lack of understanding, but it seems to me that the superiors never denied him space to do the exorcisms, while always trying to balance the needs of so many religious living together, as is required by the house of a religious order. For a brief time, a little more than a year, Father Gabriele was appointed delegate of the Pauline Province of Italy. That is, he was responsible for all the Italian Paulines during that year. During that period, I believe he ruled with an iron fist, and perhaps for this reason he was not appreciated by everyone.

He had done a little of everything for us Paulines, and he applied himself with all his being to every task entrusted to him. Many of my confreres truly loved him, and today they feel his absence. Among them, I include myself.

Why a Pauline exorcist?

These are the mysterious designs of providence. Certainly, the encounter with Cardinal Poletti changed Father Gabriele's life. Perhaps God "used" a Pauline particularly gifted in communication skills to diffuse the knowledge of the ministry of exorcism. Only a little while ago, it was considered a medieval legacy, but today, in times of runaway neo-paganism and great curiosity toward esotericism — above all among young people — it is much more necessary. So many more people are seeking emotional thrills obtained from magical practices that the number of disturbed demoniacs is ever increasing. If today the fear of the demonic has been legitimized, and if there are many priests who, authorized by their bishops, practice exorcisms, then they ought to model their communicative skills and their competences on Father Gabriele Amorth.

How did Father Gabriele come to know so many people, among whom were bishops, cardinals, and public personalities?

Father Gabriele has always been a person of note in our congregation. Since he was a young priest, whenever serious matters reached the superiors or Father Alberione, one turned for

help immediately to him. One time it was the Catholic University of Milan; another time it was Cardinal Lercaro; then the Marian Year, and so on. When Cardinal Poletti was the vicar of Rome, Father Gabriele was a habitu  . His Eminence held Father in great esteem and frequently consulted him on theological matters, especially those regarding Mariology.

After your studies in theology, did you continue to meet with Father Amorth?

Yes, of course. After I was ordained in 2007, I was transferred to Milan as a journalist at the weekly *Famiglia Cristiana*. Later I had occasion to be particularly close to a family that Father Gabriele knew well and liked very much. At the time they were enduring some spiritual difficulties, particularly the daughter, whom I worked with for two years. In that way, my experiences in Rome with Father Gabriele became useful once again. For me it was a moment of great interior growth. When I went to Rome, I profited from visits with him, when I sought his advice on how best to follow the girl.

In 2013, *Credere*, a new weekly, was begun. We immediately included a column on demonology by Father Gabriele, which I was assigned to edit. So I went periodically to Rome to interview him, and then edited the text and submitted it to him before its publication. He always responded with enthusiasm, even though the questions I asked were the same that all the other journalists had asked him numberless times.

But he never underestimated a question.

He knew that only in this way could he help the afflicted. He was also grateful that a magazine edited by his congregation gave him so much space. He followed it closely, always asking me how it was doing and offering prayers for the courage that we had demonstrated in undertaking a new work in a time of crisis in the book trade.

One last question: What sentiments do you bear in your heart now that Father Gabriele is no longer with us?

I loved him. He was like a father to me.

In times of paternity crisis, like the present — which also includes the “spiritual paternity” of us priests, unfortunately — his model serves as a point of reference for so many of the priests who have

known him. His closeness to Jesus and Mary demonstrates how much the Lord, if a creature consents to it, renders him splendid and joyful.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, speaks of the joy that accompanies those who live the Gospel intimately. Here, I believe, the figure of Father Amorth confirms this invitation that the pope makes to all the Church. It is the same invitation that Father Alberione made to all us Paulines when he spoke of the spiritual path as conformity to Jesus, the Teacher, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, transfiguring us so that it is no longer we who are living; rather, it is Christ who is living in us” (see Gal. 2:20). This is the invitation of Saint Paul; and the wish of Father Alberione was that Father Gabriele live this fullness even to the end of his days.

¹⁵ The Focolare Movement is an international Catholic organization founded in Trent, Italy, in 1943 by Chiara Lubich (1920–2008). It promotes the ideals of unity and universal brotherhood.

Father Marcello, Pauline Priest

How did you know Father Gabriele?

He was one of my confreres. I knew him for many years when I lived in Rome and he was not yet an exorcist. He was a someone with whom it was possible to establish a pleasing and constructive relationship, someone who had need of friendships and affection. He suffered much from solitude, misunderstandings, and isolation. Yet he was prepared from the first day to play a very important role in our Pauline community.

What important role?

He was a unique figure in our congregation. Normally we entered the Society of Saint Paul as children or young men — I entered at the age of ten — and we attended all the order's schools from elementary school through high school. Then we began the novitiate and later the studies for the priesthood.

Connections with the outside world were not facilitated. In our charism, we were very structured, but in interpersonal relationships, we were not formed. I recall that the day after my ordination, I was sent to hear confessions; and I had no experience other than what I had studied in books. It was not easy; I had to invent my style. I remember my astonishment while hearing the confession of a man more than eighty years old when he called me Father. I was twenty-five, and I was not ready. Also, in the seminary there was very little attention given to interpersonal skills.

Father Gabriele lived a different experience because he entered Saint Paul as an adult; he was twenty-four years old, had a law degree, had fought as a partisan in the civil war at the end of World War II, and had worked on the constitution.

Humanly speaking, he had much more experience, and he was much more open compared with those of us who were familiar only with the restricted environment of the clerical seminary. For these reasons, Father Alberione always chose Father Gabriele for delicate and important tasks involving the outside world.

Was he ever bothersome?

No, he was not considered a big shot. Other than having the appearance of an important personage, he was always a great pal, ready with a witty remark and a joke. It was difficult to argue with him. At times, you might not agree with him, but you always knew how he thought, and this helped in relating to him.

How was your rapport with Father Gabriele?

I was a young priest, and, as a spiritual student, I had total trust in him. I considered him more trustworthy than others: he seemed a person of great spirituality and discernment. I got along with him both as a confessor and as a spiritual father.

He was a little severe; therefore, I can't say that it was exactly a joy to go to him. I knew in advance when he would scold me for certain things, but then a spiritual father exists precisely to give instructions. Father Gabriele directly addressed spiritual problems while retaining the penitent's greatest trust. He always asked the most engaging question from the moral point of view and did not leave even a thread of doubt about where he stood. I always found this approach very positive: severity is better than finding yourself in difficulty because you did not know if the instructions were the fruit of discernment or affection. He was demanding, severe all along the line; he expected weekly confession, daily Rosary, and constant priority given to matters involving priestly ministry.

I found him always available; there was never any difficulty scheduling an appointment with him.

Did you ever have any clashes?

No, never. He gave me precise instructions, and there was nothing to discuss.

Also, if I mentioned something on which we differed, he was always very sure of himself, and he always knew how to respond. He would say to me, "Okay, do this and this."

And he would be right.

What was he like?

He had truly great gifts.

When he assumed a task, he dedicated himself to it with all his being. He had human capacities superior to others. He was a man of

sterling character, a Christian of another era, of that time when Sunday was a celebration of sacred things and of rest, and that's all!

Nonetheless, he always did exorcisms, even on Christmas and Easter, because it was ministerial work. We Paulines dedicate one hour a day before the Most Holy Sacrament — it is part of our rule — and he was very observant of this. In moments of prayer, he could not be disturbed.

For some he was rigid; in truth, it was a question of coherence, authentic and Christian, that allowed him to show it, not hide it. He liked to say that “the habit does not make the monk; the habit tells us you are a monk.” He practiced this until the end: even in his extreme suffering, he always tried to wear the sacred habit, the cassock, even when he would have been more comfortable in pajamas. He always thought that the habit gave witness.

Some of his lay collaborators maintain that he was isolated from his confreres because of his ministry.

I believe that the roots of a certain misunderstanding arose during the period in which he was the steward of the order for Italy; it was not a good experience for him or for his confreres. It began poorly because he was not elected democratically at the official assembly that also elects the superior general and the vicar-general. He was instead assigned to that position by the superior general, who wished to resolve some questions that were important to him. An authority imposed on an organization is always considered an intruder.

Some of his ideas were innovative and revolutionary, and perhaps they would have been effective, because, at the time, there were many vocations; but tensions were such that when he left a branch of the community, everything went back to the way it was before.

He was too authoritarian; and because he represented authority, he did not favor discussion: he expected obedience. But it was already the postconciliar period, and the concept of obedience had been revised among the religious. For Father Gabriele, a superior's directions were “the will of God.” Unfortunately, his will was considered “the will of the cuckoo” because of a ditty, a nonsense

rhyme, he liked to repeat jokingly: *Cuckoo, compagnino, compagnino bello*.

He acted with confidence and tried to be friendly, but he came across as arrogant and puffed up, as if he were scornful of his confreres. It was as bad as it could get.

How could a person so diligent and sensible fail so miserably?

Father Gabriele truly did not know how to relate to his confreres. His strengths lay in external matters where he had clear ideas. On the other hand, he lived in the community less than the others because he was always out for various commissions. When he came back, he found it hard to understand the new uneasiness underlying ways of religious life at Saint Paul, both in vocational pursuits and in the management and direction of the various magazines.

He lacked the managerial sensitivity necessary to remedy things that did not go well and to safeguard and protect those that did. He had accepted a position that was incompatible with his strengths. Among other things, he had never been a superior; and this lack of experience did not help him. He found himself in unfamiliar circumstances. He was not patient; he relied on his authority; and although later he changed his ways, his confreres were not willing to trust him anew.

Did you assist at his exorcisms?

No, I never went. Like the others, I was not trained for this.

I always believed that such problems were psychological or psychiatric, and not truly spiritual. With time, I changed my mind and came to understand the importance of Father Gabriele's work, but by then I was living far from Rome and no longer had the opportunity to be present at his exorcisms.

Anyhow, for us Paulines, the ministry of exorcism was not considered pertinent to our religious order. Other than pastoral duties, our charism centered on social communications. For this reason, Father Gabriele and priests with external appointments were at the margins of our community. So, when Father Gabriele returned to us with his exorcisms, we considered it something extraneous to convent life. It is a real shame that we did not understand and support him more.

You are no longer a young priest. Do you still think that the ministry of liberation is irrelevant to you?

Absolutely not. Spending a great deal of time in the confessional and listening to such suffering, I now understand that there is truly a great need not only to listen but also specifically to pray for healing and liberation, and for exorcisms. It would please me to be able to follow in the footsteps of Father Gabriele, who was a true father for me, but for now it is not possible. In the future, we shall see what the Lord has planned for me.

Allessia: The Girl Who Knew Him as a Knight in Shining Armor

There are some who consider Father Gabriele a saint. I do not know if he is a saint, but certainly he is a great man: one of those great men of the 1900s able to touch the heart of whoever was willing to let him do it, but at the same time gifted with the heart of a warrior.

I remember very well the day I met him.

I was seven or eight years old, and I did not know anything about spiritual problems. My parents had an appointment with him in the little room on the ground floor in front of the porter's desk. I thought it was a normal work-related appointment; my parents had many of them, even during vacations. It was spring and therefore hot. The place did not please me. The orange plaster on the wall soiled my white T-shirt, and my brother kept me calm by reading me a book.

After a time, decisively long for me, Mama came out and told us to enter.

The first time I saw him, he frightened me. I do not know if it was because of his features or because of his air of authority. He was already old, and his face was deeply lined, but he had an incredibly watchful and attentive look.

Father Gabriele was the type of man who scrutinized people, reading them interiorly. I do not know what he could read inside me, but he immediately treated me with great sweetness. I believe that he liked children. It did not take much for him to gain my trust. The goodness that emanated from him overcame far and away all the rest.

During all the other times I saw him, I clearly recall one thing: when he did the exorcism, he was like a war machine. He would go from the beginning to the end totally focused on what he was doing. Perhaps it is a childish comparison, but he seemed to me like a knight in shining armor. He would unsheathe his sword, and he would fight. He was not afraid, or at least this was my impression.

Having finished the exorcism, he changed. He would become affectionate, and he would always ask how we were, and he would listen.

He would truly listen.

And then each time, he would find a way to ease the tensions with his sense of humor. At times, he related anecdotes about when he was little, at times about his experiences as exorcist.

Each time, he would give me instructions like those that adults often give to children and young people, such as “I implore you, be good with your Mama and Papa,” which would seem boring and insupportable if they were not said by someone who truly wished you well.

I do not have grandparents, so he told me these things. But he did not say them with the resignation of a person who has lost a battle. He said them seriously, and this spurred me on to try.

Before leaving, he would have all of us hold hands — me with my family and him, and we would say a prayer, usually the Hail Mary.

I did not see him often — usually only once or twice a year — but despite his age and fatigue, his disposition was always the same.

Before his funeral, I had never entered the Church of Regina Apostolorum. During the funeral, it was full of people who came to say good-bye to him. There were dozens of priests on the altar, some impassive, others visibly moved. Among the procession of people who approached the coffin before the Mass, few returned without tears.

I felt proud of him for all that he had done and all the people he had touched. The Mass was like a great embrace: on my side, the laity; on the other, the priests; and in the middle, him.

I think that those who had obstructed him during his life were made aware that this was truly an important moment.

He was truly a great man: one of the greatest I have ever known.

Eulogy

Dear Father Gabriele,

Here we are saying our last good-bye.

There are so many, many things that we would like to say to you at this, our last earthly leave-taking, with everyone here united in the one faith that can save us: faith in Christ the Risen One. Only in Him is there salvation, life, hope, joy, and liberation from the many evils that afflict us, that strike humanity. And you, Father Gabriele, faithful son of Blessed Giacomo Alberione, founder of the Pauline Family, taught this to us in so many ways during your long life.

Today we do not wish to cry over your departure. You would not have wished it. To cheer us, you would say, as is your style: “Dear little friend friend (*compagnino bello, compagnina bella*), what is that funereal air? Jesus is not at all content! Be festive, because finally I have met my Lord, and up here we are celebrating. What a party!”

You know, Father Gabriele, we believe you; but we think that for you, as for everyone, the passage to death was difficult. Let us recall the words of the psalmist that we have just listened to; we believe that they were also your words in those last moments:

Make haste to answer me, O LORD!

My spirit fails!

Hide not thy face from me,

lest I be like those who go down to the Pit. (Ps. 143:7)

They are words of hope, of expectation. Immediately after, we think of you immersed in the love of God, the God you have served faithfully as a priest since your ordination in that distant 1954, and whom you sought since your childhood.

Even during your youth, you felt called to defend the Italian people and our country, as a partisan, risking your life. Yes, because, as the Apostle Paul says, the Christian, the man of God, the pastor, is willing to risk and even lose his own life for his brother, since he knows that he is not losing it, because he has gained Christ (Phil. 3:8–9).

That is everything.

And you, as a good Pauline, knew it and lived it well.

But you also served the Lord when you entered political life, as a twenty-year-old, following in the footsteps of your father, Mario. You glimpsed the resplendent face of God in the men of God and in the saints whom you knew as a young man: those who were engaged in politics (the Servants of God Giorgio La Pira and Alcide De Gasperi; the Venerable Giuseppe Lazzati and Giuseppe Dossetti) and those consecrated to God in the Church: Saint John Paul II and Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, the Blessed Giacomo Alberione, the Venerable Mother Nina, mother of your dear Pauline friend Father Franco Testi, and Father Zeno of Nomadelfia, and who knows how many others.

But since 1985, you have seen the face of our Lord Jesus in another realm He loved, in the sorrowful eyes and faces of the demoniacs, those afflicted by sicknesses of the spirit and the mind, those who, by the thousands, have knocked on your door seeking help and comfort. They also are the *Anawim*,¹⁶ the poor of Israel, whom Jesus looked upon with compassion, loving them and liberating them. And you, as exorcist of the Diocese of Rome, continued this work for so many years in Jesus' name.

For us, today, there is a great emptiness, but biblical history teaches that when each great man of God dies, he leaves a legacy. Our thoughts turn to Elijah, who left his cloak, a sign of his prophetic mission, to Elisha, while he was being taken up in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2). And all of us, dear Father Gabriele, are your heirs.

You have passed on to all of us Paulines and all the members of the Pauline Family your great love for our "First Teacher," Blessed Father Giacomo Alberione, our founder. You knew up close his spiritual strength, his sanctity, and his love for Jesus, the Divine Master. You understood in your "divided" life the fruitful union of the apostolate and prayer. One without the other is a sterile, bare exercise.

One is a Pauline and Christian journalist, bookseller, and evangelizer only if one lives a life united to God. The Benedictine motto — "pray and work" — fundamentally underlies the Pauline spirituality in today's world of mass communication, a calling that we Paulines have adopted.

From you, who have been a father for many, we priests have inherited the sense of paternity.

In a world that renders everyone ever more autonomous and self-referential, to be a father is a sign of prophecy. You have been a father for so many, teaching us that paternity means to sympathize, to help, to warn, to give hope for the future, to encourage, and to communicate with deeds and words that we are all children of the only Father, who has saved us in the Son.

You have taught us that to be a father means to love.

To your many exorcist colleagues, you leave your counsel and your experience, which is more fascinating than understood and appreciated. They have seen you as a teacher and a soldier in the struggle against Satan, equipped only with the arms of the Spirit, as Saint Paul records: with truth a belt around your waist, uprightness as a breastplate, sandals of readiness to announce the gospel of peace, the shield of faith to quench the burning arrows of the Evil One, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Holy Spirit, that is the Word of God (see Eph. 6:14–17).

We are grateful to you because, thanks to your books, your interviews, and your insistence on every occasion — “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2) — the number of exorcists has increased in the Church, even if not as much as you would have wished.

It is thanks to your being a Pauline communicator that so many brother exorcists have been able to get involved in this ministry that is so difficult and delicate. From your place in Heaven, may you protect them and encourage them to persevere in this precious service to the people of God. Assist their many lay helpers (colleagues such as Rosa, your longtime assistant and right arm for so many years) who heroically gave their time to this work of spiritual mercy.

Your afflicted friends in the spirit have inherited from you your sense of Christian hope.

In the passage from Revelation that we just heard, the apostle John writes: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more” (Rev. 21:1). God makes all things new; He makes our life new. Those who have been liberated from the baleful effects of the Devil have experienced it firsthand. Those of us who are still on the journey know that the Enemy of man, the Devil, will not ever have

the last word and that he cannot test us beyond our strength: the Apostle Paul has assured us of this (1 Cor. 10:13).

There is only one who has the last word, Christ the Lord. It is the Cross that saves. “*Ecce crux Domini*” (Behold the Cross of the Lord), one reads in the *Rite of Exorcism*. The Cross does not mean death but life. Here is the ultimate sense of Christian hope. Here is the sense of the Christian revolution that you live in your flesh.

The people of God inherited so many things from you — above all, the spirit of the Beatitudes, so wonderfully expressed by Jesus in the passage from Saint Matthew’s Gospel that we just heard: the irrepressible desire for sanctity, the unique perspective of the sense of the Christian life.

Pope Francis has called it the “the Christian’s identity card”: poverty of spirit, mildness, thirst for justice, mercy, purity of heart, and hunger for peace. For the world, being persecuted, afflicted, or insulted is folly. It is the foolishness of the Cross, but for the one who is saved, it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). To discover peace and joy in suffering, even in the suffering of diabolic possession, is the challenge that you, Father Gabriele, accepted, lived, and suffered in our midst during so many ups and downs.

But the community of the faithful also has inherited the tragic sense of sin, which our culture contests or ridicules, and the memory of the judgment of our life that each of us must undergo before God on the last day. You have fought hand to hand with the Devil, dear Father Gabriele, against the extraordinary manifestations of Satan.

But you have not ceased to put us on our guard against the greater danger that threatens everyone: the most ordinary manifestation of evil — that is, sin, which makes us killers of brother and of sister in every possible way. The passage from Revelation we heard earlier reminds us that on the last day, we shall present ourselves together with all our works, both good and bad, and be judged by the mercy of God on how we have lived.

Finally, we have inherited from you your love for Mary.

You, who witnessed the construction of our sanctuary, the fulfillment of Father Alberione’s vow made to the Queen of the Apostles during World War II: that if no Pauline was killed, he would construct a sanctuary dedicated to her. You also, dear Father

Gabriele, are a part of this vow. You and your four brothers were saved, and your mother and you have always believed that it was our Heavenly Mother, Queen of the Apostles, who protected you and your siblings, by arming you with a powerful weapon, the Rosary, the topic of your final book.

Thank you, Father Gabriele, for what you are.

From Heaven to earth, we, your heirs, feel your closeness and your comfort.

One day, when each of our tears will be dried (Rev. 21:4), we are certain of meeting you again, saints among saints, and of hearing you say to us once again: "Welcome, my friends!"

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Father Stefano Stimamiglio
Secretary General of the Society of Saint Paul
Rome, September 19, 2016

¹⁶ *Anawim*: The poor ones in the Old Testament who remained faithful to God in times of difficulty and became known as "the faithful remnant."

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